

Azuveya: Fury Oh Fury

by Kira Kyuu

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Summary: Aloe Potter (fem!HP) wasn't sure how she got here - 'here' being in what seemed to be a young girl's body, four-hundred-and-some-odd years into the future, and at risk of being killed by an alien empire, but it seemed like something her luck would come up with.

1. My Heart Beats

****AN: ****So, this is a new story. This will cover from HP's introduction to the end of Halo: Reach, before the start of Halo: Combat Evolved, and will be AU â€" so keep that in mind! I will be using words in different languages â€" primarily Hungarian â€" so if you see a mistake, please tell me. Translations will be included at the end of each chapter. Also, if you have questions, please ask them! I am more than happy to answer, unless it's too spoilery for the story.

****Azuveya: Fury, Oh Fury****

****Chapter One: My Heart Beats****

Let it be said first and foremost that Aloe was not stupid. She knew, somehow, somehow, that she was no longer who â€" where â€" she had been, despite not quite recalling what had happened. The steady sound of muggle machinery, the smell of muggle medicines and sicknesses, and the pervasive ache throughout her whole body told her this. The witch felt for her magic, nearly crying out loud when she felt only a tiny fraction of what her core had been. Even then, it trickled like water through Aloe's grasping 'hands', nowhere near as potent or as strong as it had been before this. . . incident.

A door creaked open, finally urging Aloe to open her eyes. The light pierced them, though, causing pain to spike through her skull. The person â€" brown haired and pale, though a blur to Aloe â€" gasped, then ducked out again, calling out for a doctor and for someone named John. The witch blinked her eyes, trying to rid them of the

blurriness. A sudden bout of exhaustion and her weakened magic flaring heralded the return of her sight.

Aloe turned her eyes onto the woman, assessing her. Dark brown hair, pale flesh spotted with freckles, bright blue eyes â€" a total stranger. Yet she looked at Aloe with recognition, with happiness. . with love. It made her chest ache with longing.

"Kelly," the woman sighed in relief, coming to sit at Aloe's side, taking her hand. _Who is Kelly? _Aloe wondered, _And how is she mistaking me for . . . _ The witch's thoughts trailed off as she realized just how small her hand was. It was a young child's hand. There was a simple tag on her wrist:

_Black, Kelly Sex: F
>DOB: 1406/2508 Adm:06/06/2517
>Attending Dr: DuFresne, Matthew

What? _What?_ She â€" Aloe wasn't nine years old. She . . . _There isn't really much I can do about this, though. Not with the amount of magic I have. Just what the bloody hell happened to me?_ Aloe wondered, shocked. In the future, _and_ de-aged? Was it a potions accident? A spell?

"Kelly?" the woman asked, shaking Aloe's hand gently. Worry was clear in her voice. _What happened to her daughter? If I _am_ her daughter, why don't I remember more?_

The witch took a deep breath, forcing her eyes away from the hospital tag, and stared at the woman. "Who are you?" Aloe asked, knowing almost as soon as those words passed her lips, she was breaking the woman's heart, "W-Where am I?"

Before the woman could rouse herself from her apparent shock, the door opened, admitting two men. One was in a typical muggle doctor's outfit â€" _At least that doesn't seem to have changed much _â€" while the other seemed to be in a uniform. Both men had dark hair and dark eyes, though the doctor's were a dark blue to the other's hazel, and they both seemed fairly tan.

"Kelly," the doctor greeted with a wide, genuine smile, "How are you feeling today?" Aloe stared at him silently, then let her eyes shift warily between the three . . . the three _adults_. She waited for the woman â€" Missus Black, presumably â€" to speak.

"Doctor DuFresne," the woman managed to choke out, "She â€" Kelly doesn't seem to remember anything." The doctor's eyes widened in shock, the smile vanishing as worry took its place. He had such an expressive face.

"Is this true, Kelly?" DuFresne asked, already walking forward to grab a â€" a thin metal pad at the end of her bed. The equivalent to a clipboard?

"I don't â€" . . . I'm scared," Aloe whispered, hunching into herself, "I don't remember any of you. I don't remember who I am. Why am I here â€" where _is_ here?"

More worried looks were exchanged between the adults, the least expressive of which was the man in uniform. "Your mother," the man in

uniform finally said, indicating Missus Black, "Is Eva Black. I am your father, John Black. You are Kelly, our daughter. You collapsed a little while ago, and we brought you to the hospital. He is your doctor, Matt DuFresne. You are nine years old, and you are ill."

Aloe was quiet, musing on that information. She studied her hand conjoined with Eva's. Finally, she nodded slowly. "Okay. What am I sick with?" she asked quietly. They turned to DuFresne, who shuffled uncertainly.

"We. . . We aren't sure, to be perfectly honest. Your heart just shut down of its own accord â€" we can't figure out why. Then your lungs did, about a week ago. Both managed to re-establish â€" to, er, start again on their own, with little help from us, but. . . again, we don't know how or why," the doctor admitted reluctantly, "We would like to run a few tests, to make sure nothing else seems to be at risk." He looked at the Black adults, no doubt seeking permission.

Aloe felt a scowl flicker onto her face, but quickly shook it away. Just because she knew she was an adult mentally, didn't mean they knew that, and she couldn't exactly tell them without seeming insane. This would take getting used to.

"So long as your tests don't hurt her," John allowed, a frown in place as he studied his 'daughter', worry shining in his hazel eyes.

"They shouldn't," DuFresne was quick to reassure.

Except they did. Kel- Aloe's nerves seemed to be oversensitive, as if she had been under Crucio. Anything heavier than a light, barely-there touch stung. Needles certainly hurt far worse than she recalled, and her migraine worsened with each 'test'.

This would take a lot of getting used to. And she still didn't know where she was.

****AN:****__So, this entire storyline (up to the end of Halo: Reach) is complete. The next part (Halo: Combat Evolved to the interim between Halo: CE and Halo 2) is being written now.

Comments and questions are welcome!

2. So I Hold it Back

****AN: ****Again, a reminder: This is AU. Expect things to go AU. Questions can be directed to me at any point. I suppose I should have pointed out earlier that this will contain heavy references to H4: Forward Unto Dawn, the Halo books, as well as the games, and quite possibly Red vs Blue._

****Chapter Two: So I Hold It Back****

Aloe slowly grew used to being 'Kelly' â€" sickly Kelly Black who was often in hospitals, but still lively and edging on hyperactive when able to move freely. The mystery of her body failing and regenerating wasn't quite solved, either. Judging by her meagre amount of magic,

Aloe had come to believe that most, if not all, of her magic was used up in keeping her body alive and forcing it to be harder with each 'failure'.

It was a large concern to her, as a person's magic could become too used to doing one thing â€" very well, granted â€" but in turn became less versatile. Such examples were seen in Dumbledore and Minerva's abilities with transfiguration, and Ginny's affinity with charms. The most versatile of people she had met were Fred and George.

If Aloe ever became healthy, she likely wouldn't be able to do anything other than heal. Aloe didn't mind too much, though she would miss the versatility of magic. As it was, she was grateful for having a family now â€" even if she had taken the place of their true daughter. Eva was kind, though fully capable of being harsh and even frightening. Her maternal grandparents had been military personnel, and her brother had a job somewhere classified, though he called semi-frequently.

John, as it would turn out, was a general for the United Nations Space Command, the military, science, and exploratory branch of the 'United Earth Government'. He was away half of the time, but visited fairly often, always doting upon his 'daughter'. Aloe was a touch ashamed to be enjoying his attentions, as she wasn't his daughter. The weak witch grew to ignore that reluctance, however, and took her time to enjoy this life while she could.

They lived in what seemed to be an average house in the suburbs of 'Elysium', on Eridanus II, in the Eridanus system. She was homeschooled by Eva, and Doctor DuFresne had a habit of giving her gifts â€" books, mostly, a fair few on ailments and injuries. Aloe readily devoured every tidbit of information she could get her hands on, eager to learn about where she was and to supplement her previous experiences.

By the time Kelly was fourteen, she began to remember her 'death'. It had largely been due to her predictability with saving innocent lives and the machinations of the enemies she had made up to that point. Aloe had saved the innocents, though â€" except for the one that hadn't been a civilian, being the one to orchestrate the trap.

By sixteen, she was certain she would choose to fight for the UNSC. She heard of the terrorist acts committed by the Insurrectionists in spite of her father's attempts to hide it from her. Eva died to those terrorists â€" an accident, as she was merely 'caught in the crossfire' â€" and Aloe â€" Kelly didn't take kindly to people harming what was hers. The one time she chose to be selfish, and they take her mother away.

After that, the Blacks â€" what remained of the Blacks â€" moved to Circinius IV. Once Kelly was seventeen, she asked permission to join the Corbulo Military Academy. Her father had to pull a few strings â€" mostly to the tune of the Academy ignoring her past ailments â€" but she got in. She got in, and managed to prove her doubters wrong.

Her squad was an older one â€" two of their members had washed out and were replaced with recruits, and when most of them graduated, they were replaced by more recruits. The squad leader was another senior cadet by the name of April Orenski, with whom Kelly got along

with fairly well, in spite of Orenski's seriousness. The recruits were JunJie Chen, a Chinese boy who was from a civilian background; Thomas Lasky, a Caucasian boy with military ties; Chyler Silva, a Caucasian girl with military in her blood; Michael Sullivan, who, like Lasky, was Caucasian and possessed military ties; and Walter Vickers, an Irish-descendant with possible military ties.

They had a lot of potential. More than her first squad had â€" more than Orenski has. Let it not be said that Aloe wasn't capable of manipulating people. She nipped at the heels of her teammates in their 'specialized' areas, forcing them to become better and better. Even outside their specialized fields, she tried to help them â€" not the same way as Orenski, by yelling and being cold and distant, but instead by becoming friendly and showing them how to do as she did. How to become better.

Kelly's body grew better and better, though, and eventually grew to be stronger and faster than it ought to have been, compared to Orenski and Silva. Bizarre dreams became a common occurrence, though she attributed them to the changed military atmosphere, of becoming more involved with her squad.

Sometimes she spoke to her father â€" well, far more frequently than any other cadet did. It was at one of these meetings that John brought up her change in scores. "I'm pushing at my squad," Aloe had replied simply, blinking gunmetal-green eyes at her father.

"Pushing?" the general asked, a frown in place. He seemed concerned by her behaviour, in itself odd. So long as Kelly did well, he didn't seem to care overmuch as to what she did.

"They have potential," the witch elaborated, "I want them to reach that potential. I'm already reaching the end of my fourth year here, and I've shown what I can do, so I thought I would help them."

His dark eyes studied her, clearly curious. "You think you can do that?" There was a touch of doubt to his voice. "What about your squad leader â€" Orenski?"

Kelly tilted her head, wondering how to word this. "Orenski's good," she finally allowed, "But I'm sure that the team can become better. I've been trying to get Orenski to loosen up, but she takes combat far too seriously for her to be safe in her mental state. To get out of it as unscathed as possible. She lacks determination, as well, beyond proving herself as capable. Versatility, as well, for a commanding officer, though that may simply be my opinion."

John continued to study her for a long moment. "Six months. You have six months to get them to show this potential. If they don't show it, I want you to stop holding back. Am I clear?"

He couldn't force Kelly to do anything, but she knew that he knew that she would at least take his opinion into consideration. "If they don't work out, I will stop holding back," she agreed, lips widening slightly into a grin.

****AN:**** Yay, another installment! For those of you unfamiliar with Halo 4: Forward Unto Dawn, the entirety of it is on Hulu. I'd recommend familiarizing yourself with it, if you haven't already.

****Chapter Three: In the Spring I Sprout****

Making Hastati Squad show their potential was a feat in and of itself, given how little they meshed. JunJie, Walter, 'Sully', and herself were closest out of them, so it was easiest to push at them. Chyler and Thomas were distant, as was April. The three boys improved the most, startlingly quickly. They reminded Kelly almost of herself, when she began to realize her potential and the full extent of the changes her magic wrought upon her body.

Even before she had hit puberty, Matt "as Doctor DuFresne had insisted to be called after her tenth visit to Carlos Schwabe Hospital" had noted the peculiar strength of her body, except for her organs. It was her organs that had a tendency to fail, or falter. Everything else was strong "her flesh; her nervous, circulatory, lymphatic, and muscular systems; all fully functional, nearly beyond so, in fact. Kelly's body did not falter more than once" not for the same problem, in any case.

Of course, different ailments could "and typically did" befall the same organs. One such example could be cancer of the lung, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and cystic fibrosis. They never occurred more than once and always cleared up in extraordinary time frames. Study of her blood had done little to show how it was possible, and the Blacks as a whole did have government officials come knocking more than once, but Kelly had never been outed as Aloe or as a magical.

Barbs had been sent her father's way, as well, as if to prod him into admitting he had access to magic. Kelly was hardly certain of that, but it was the conclusion she had drawn. Their not-so-subtle emphasis on 'magic' and 'miracles' did little to sway her opinion. Even Matt had been questioned thoroughly. Beyond that, however, Kelly's condition was kept fairly quiet as a whole. They had no answers for how she healed and recovered so well with little medicinal input, and seemed to have no desire to bring the wrath of the public down onto themselves.

"Kelly?" She shook off her musings, turning her to bunk's door. Oddly, it was Lasky that stood there, shifting from foot to foot.

"Yes?" she offered after a too-long moment of silence. Lasky shifted again, glancing down the halls.

"You " You've been helping the others, right?" he asked, nervousness creeping into his voice, "I've seen you sparring with JJ and the others. I was wondering if " if you could help me?"

Gunmetal green eyes narrowed, wondering at his change. The first time she had offered to spar with him, he had refused, ending up with Silva. The boy was rather determined to get better, to be better, but he had an annoying tendency to refuse assistance " at least from her.

"Why?" The simple question seemed to throw the other cadet off.

"Why â€" why what?" he demanded defensively, a scowl leaping into place.

"Why are you seeking me out now? I offered earlier â€" and, if I recall correctly, you refused my help then. So, why now?" she elucidated, a frown ticking down her own lips. Lasky mumbled something that she just barely could make out.

"Speak up," she ordered sharply, eyes not leaving his face even as it was ducked.

"I didn't think you could help me, all right?" the boy angrily snapped, "You're smaller than everyone else here!"

The witch tilted her head, far from offended. She had always been small, even as Aloe. Eva was also on the small side, and John was far from the typical imposing soldier type, so it seemed logical that Kelly was on the small side, as well. Finally, she asked, "What changed your mind, then?"

Lasky's lips were a thin slash across his face, dark brows drawn downward. "Colonel Mehaffey suggested I come to you. She said you were more than able to help me."

Colonel Keela Mehaffey. . . A friend of her father's, as far as Kelly knew, but she had little direct contact with the colonel herself. Hm. Perhaps Colonel Mehaffey had other reasons for choosing Kelly, but what they were, she didn't know.

"Fine. After supper, we'll go to the training room. I'll test your close quarter combat capabilities then. Be ready," the witch offered, already assessing his body. He seemed to be weak, strength-wise, and was likely on the slower side, especially compared to her. Kelly didn't know his C.Q.C. scores, either, but he had a sharp mind, as far as she was aware. Such potential he possessed.

The 'test' went. . . fairly well, all things considered. Kelly's friends were present, taking turn sparring amongst themselves. Lasky had shit for stamina, but he did â€" as she had previously believed â€" have a good head for analyzing. He still ended up on the floor.

The fourth time, Lasky let out a vicious curse, but remained where he lay. JunJie and Walter both let out barks of laughter, while Sully manoeuvred Lasky up, offering him a bottle of water. The exhausted teen accepted the offering, guzzling down half the bottle.

"How do you keep up with her?" he finally demanded of the others once his breathing was under control.

JunJie let out an inelegant snort. "_Keep up?_ There is no 'keeping up' with Kelly. Even when she's holding back, we can hardly block or dodge her. She was going easy on you." Another laugh bubbled out of Walter at Lasky's shocked face.

"Don't worry," Kelly advised, "You'll get to their level soon enough, if I have anything to say about it." There was a half-smile dancing

on her lips, amusement clear. The antics of her friends eased her worries over inviting Lasky to join them.

In spite of Lasky's fears, however, it had taken the better part of a month for there to be a significant improvement in his abilities. In that month, the majority of the squad didn't practice their C.Q.C. nearly as often as they could have, partially due to their studies requiring just as much, if not more, time devoted to them. Thomas' disobedient tendencies were. . . softened, so to speak, in that timeframe, but not utterly eliminated.

Of the group " despite Kelly's attempts " he listened to her the most. Not Orenski, not Silva, nor any of the others " _her_. Which, out of all the outcomes she had hoped for. . . wasn't quite one Kelly was looking for. She didn't want them to follow her directly. She had enough of that during her own war. The witch would give advice, training, what-have-you, but she did _not_ want to lead. Not anymore.

4. Tapped Into

****AN:**** I hope you enjoy :D Please leave a review " I do like hearing what you think so far!

****Chapter Four: Tapped Into****

JunJie was almost startlingly agile. He was the one to give Kelly the most trouble in the C.Q.C part of their training. He forced Kelly to get better in some ways, as well. Sometimes, he managed to surprise her, to make her improvise and reveal parts of her own knowledge that she wasn't aware that she had.

"Where'd you learn to do that?" the Asiatic boy asked after a particularly grueling bout. He had a bruise blossoming on his shoulder. Kelly rolled her own shoulders, stretching.

"Do what?" she asked in return, unsure of what he meant. The witch mentally reviewed the spar, a frown flickering on her lips. Most of their fight had been spent flowing around each other, or throwing feints at their opponent. The cause of his bruise was a twisting throw to the mats, where he landed awkwardly.

"That throw." JunJie stretched, trying to roll the ache out of the limb. He seemed visibly impressed, more so than usual. Kelly offered a half shrug, not entirely certain herself. Fighting like this " in close quarters " was something Aloe had learned later in life; that throw, however, was not something she remembered Aloe learning. Now that she thought on it, a fair number of her moves weren't ones she recalled learning in her 'previous life'.

"Again? Or would you like a break?" she asked of her squadmate. He rolled his shoulder experimentally, then nodded, settling into a ready stance.

By contrast, Walter gave Kelly the _least_ amount of trouble. He was strong, she'd give him that, but he wasn't quick, nor was he flexible, not at all like JunJie. Walter was better suited to his potential as a heavy weapons specialist. He had a good arm, for grenades, and a good eye for aiming rocket and grenade launchers. He

still improved â€" Kelly wouldn't let him not improve, after all. Just not as much as JunJie, or Thomas, or even Michael did. Once Walter got his hands on someone, though, it would be the end of that fight. Unless that someone was Kelly.

(Kelly was too strong, too fast, too durable â€" she blamed her magic, but she couldn't blame it for her ability to fight so well. Aloe hadn't been able to. What was so different about Kelly? What made Kelly so ready to fight, what gave her these. . . techniques that she hadn't learned as Aloe? She didn't know, but she wanted to know â€" needed to know.)

Thomas was a strategist â€" he learned quickly how to improvise and how to use Kelly's habits against her. He was also one to help her improve, but he helped JunJie more. She wasn't the only one they sparred against, after all â€" she had them spar versus each other, as well. Silva was alone, though â€" afraid, perhaps, or maybe she didn't realize what was going on, however doubtful that possibility was.

Sully â€" Michael â€" wasn't the best at C.Q.C., either, though he was surprisingly good at knife fighting. His specialty was reconnaissance and putting together information. He was almost better than Kelly, in that respect, but he wasn't very experienced at observing people and situations. Not like her.

In their own individual areas, each could have surpassed Kelly â€" if not for her magic. Her magic kept her alive, kept her moving, improving her with each day passing. Sometimes, she could almost feel the differences between one day and the next, but those were rare instances that Kelly was never quite sure of.

Silva ended up being brought by Thomas to the sparring sessions with little warning. Kelly had been expecting this â€" she knew how close the two were, comparatively speaking â€" and had wondered when Lasky would end up bring his friend 'into the loop', so to speak. The others were less pleased by the development, Walter most prominently so. It had taken nearly getting his ass handed to him by the girl for him to concede that her being there would help.

Between all of them, Silva was the closest to Walter, in close quarter abilities. Michael and Thomas were the next step up, then JunJie and Kelly. Orenski herself was between Kelly and Michael, in unarmed fighting.

In shooting, however. . . With the MA5B assault rifle, Silva and Orenski were the best shots with those. That's not to say Kelly was a slouch, or that any of the boys were abysmal at it, Silva and Orenski were simply better. Of course, give Kelly any pistol or sniper rifle, perhaps even a battle rifle or designated marksman rifle, and she would outshoot any in the Academy, let alone Hastati. Give Walter any heavy weapons, and he could outshoot her with those. Thomas and Michael were the least accurate, though that didn't make them any less than average.

"Kelly!" The witch turned from her desk, tilting her head in curiosity. Sully seemed peculiarly eager for her attention. She shut her notebook â€" where she had a written record of her squad's abilities, largely for her father's benefit, though she did use it to help plan their training â€" and turned fully towards her

squadmate.

"We got clearance to go into the city! You wanna come?" Sully asked, nearly bouncing in place. They had permission? It wasn't often that the students of Corbulo could go into Caligula, let alone her squad. It has only happened a few times since she joined the Academy.

"Are you crazy? Of course I'm going!" Kelly retorted, moving to her closet. Now. . . civilian clothes. . . She had some of those, somewhere.

5. When You Lied

****AN: ****Thank you, those of you who have reviewed! ****Juoe****, I hope you continue to enjoy this! For those who don't know what a '_dÃ@colletage'_ is, it's the upper part of a woman's torso revealed by a neckline, though it's more commonly used to refer to the bit of chest between neck and breasts on a woman, as I've used here. Also, kudos to anyone who catches the non-Halo/RvB references in this chapter.

****Chapter Five: When You Lied**
>

Kelly wasn't surprised when the majority of Hastati gave surprised exclamations at the sight of scars on her arms, dÃ@colletage, and upper back. Faint, but still clear in the light of the Academy.

"What happened to you?" Walter was the first to demand, brown eyes round in his shock. The ginger seemed paler than normal, as did most of Hastati.

Kelly glanced at her father, who stood with their chaperone. The general's mouth thinned, but he gave a single curt nod, allowing her to choose what to tell them. "It's not important right now," she finally uttered, "I, for one, want to go have some fun." The witch may technically old enough to be her father's mother, but she was in the body of a young adult â€" why not take advantage of that while she still had the chance?

Her squad subsided, piling into the civilian-grade transport. Kelly took that time to survey her team's choice in clothing.

It was no surprise that Silva â€" _Chyler_ had ended up in one of the standard issue singlets, fatigue trousers, and boots, as most students waited at least until their first 'day off' to purchase civvies. Or â€" April was dressed similarly, more out of personal preference than any real lack of civilian clothes. Sully and Thomas both were issue singlets, as well, but they had their own jackets and jeans on, while JunJie and Walter both had a full set of civvies â€" jeans, t-shirts, jackets, and trainers. Kelly herself was clad in a simple blue singlet, jeans, and converse.

As if feeling the witch's eyes on them, most of her team turned to her. "You gonna tell us about those scars?" Walter finally prodded. Kelly narrowed her eyes slightly, glancing up at their escort â€" a tanned man, shorn hair, a typical jar-head, if not for the way he seemed so tense. One with copious experience.

"You wanna know how I got these scars?" she asked, a grim smile flashing across her face as she parroted a line from a 21st century movie. The smile widened as only one person seemed to catch the joke â€" their escort. Still, some of Hastati nodded, though caution became apparent on their faces.

"Surgeries," she finally admitted, "To keep me alive, when I was a kid." They exchanged looks, as if not entirely sure whether or not to believe her. Kelly shrugged, not sure what else to tell them.

"Surgeries that require access to your spine? To your chest?" April asked skeptically, "I mean. . . that explains the marks on your arms, I guess."

Kelly nodded. "It's not as if they could access my organs otherwise. Same for the spine â€" they needed access, mostly to ensure it wasn't damaged or degrading, like my organs had been."

"Wait, wait, hold on!" exclaimed JunJie, "If your organs were failing, you had to have been in the hospital for â€" how long? Months at least â€" years, most likely. How did you manage to get into the Academy?" Right. Right. How to say this. . .

"We're in Caligula," their escort interrupted, "Where to first? I'm a bit hungry, myself." Half of Hastati turned to him, startled, as if they had forgotten his presence. Kelly took the opportunity to pull her hair out of its braid, running her hand through the loose black locks hastily. They would cover most of her scarring.

"I would suggest the Torn Balteus for food, maybe drinks. They have television, as well," she offered when no one spoke up, "If not that, then we can probably go pick up some things for the freshmen. They should have points by now."

"You're changing the subject," Sully pointed out sourly. The witch nodded amicably, tilting her head as she thought of what to tell them.

"Her father is the general, you know," their escort chimed in, drawing their attention to him. Kelly found herself thankful that she didn't have to point that out.

"I wanted to join the military," she elaborated quietly, "And he had hoped that the Academy would dissuade me. Then he and all the others who had doubted me were proven wrong. I am a good soldier â€" I can be a great soldier. He stopped trying to get me to quit."

"What caused your. . ." Sully trailed off, clearly uncertain how to phrase what he wanted to know. Kelly assumed he meant her organ failure.

"The doctors called it the 'Black Button malfunction'," the witch reluctantly offered the lie, "They said my organs had aged prematurely due to some mistake by my chromosomes or telomeres, or something. They said it wasn't very common." She shrugged, looking away from her squad.

"Where do you want to go?" Kelly really needed to find out the name

of their escort. She also needed to thank him, for trying to shift the subject away from her. . . past. Her partial truths and half lies. She gave her squad a questioning look.

"Food or shopping?" she asked her squad, looking at them curiously. The boys groaned simultaneously.

"Can't we do something _fun_? That's the whole reason we're here, right?" Walter demanded, nearly pouting.

"There's billiards and bowling," Kelly offered, "And paint-ball games â€" quite similar to our active weapons training. Most of the 'fun' stuff is either drinking or war-like, geared towards soldiers."

"Don't forget the card games," the escort added. The witch nodded amicably, "And card games of varying sorts, on which one can bet their points or money, if they have it." She usually didn't play cards â€" had odd turns of luck, most of the time, though the games were quite fun with others.

"How old are you kids, anyway?" the older man â€" the soldier asked.

"Why?" Walter wondered.

"So he can know if you're allowed to drink alcohol. Orenski and I can, sir, I don't think they can."

The soldier sighed heavily. "Of course they can't. That takes half the fun out of getting leave." Kelly found herself smiling.

"Let's get food. We can look at clothes and shit later," Walter decided for them. No one protested. They had all day, after all.

"Food it is."

6. Learn From a Man

****AN:**** Thank you again, those of you who reviewed! ****Opinr****, I hope you continue to enjoy Azuveya :] OH! And I forgot that FFN doesn't have tags like AO3, so â€" Expect everyone to live. Seriously. Super-Kelly's not gonna let anyone die without a damn good fight, at very least. And her being there changes _everything_. _COVER IMAGE COURTESY OF MIS-KIN ON DEVIANTART!_

****Chapter Six: Learn From a Man****

Hastati plus escort were crowded around a table, most laughing or at least smiling as Kelly regaled them with tales of the previous squad and the pranks pulled on her when she joined the team. And, of course, the revenge pranks she pulled on them.

As the waitress came around, the witch turned to their escort, a sheepish expression in place. Before she could speak, however, the man held out his hand, a rakish smirk in place. "John Forge."

Kelly felt a flush creep up her cheeks, and tried to banish it as she

took his hand. "Kelly Black, as you know." April nudged her, gesturing to the waitress. The witch offered up a broader smile. "I'd like a korobela â€" you still have that right? â€" and a glass of water. As for food, I think the adana and patlÄ+can kebabs sounds good." The waitress â€" Bethany, if Kelly recalled correctly â€" nodded as well, taking a brief look at the witch's identification to make sure she could have the korobela, a fairly strong alcoholic drink.

Forge was quick to order his own food â€" the Greek moussaka, a sort of casserole, and rice, in addition to his own Ginger Yule drink â€" and the waitress bustled off to turn their order in.

April scoffed lightly, having not ordered any alcohol. "You're missing out," Kelly informed her semi-seriously, her smile shifting to a light-hearted smirk as she glanced over at the rest of Hastati. Some â€" Walter, mostly â€" seemed inordinately jealous of her ability to consume alcohol. The older woman cast him a questioning glance, only to turn away as Forge brushed her shoulder, bringing her attention to him.

"I've seen you fighting â€" you're good," he offered. Kelly tilted her head slightly, trying to remember if she had seen him in the training room, but she didn't often pay attention to who was in the room while she was sparring.

"Sparring," she finally corrected, earning a look of confusion. "I was sparring, not fighting," she explained, "I have to hold back while sparring â€" they're not ready for it." The witch glanced over at her team. Walter, Michael, Thomas, and Chyler were deep in discussion, gesturing wildly. From what she could hear, they were arguing about what aspect of their skills were the most valuable. She would have to tell them any over-specialization was deadly for them. Later, of course. When she would be teaching them.

"Who else have you sparred against, then? Anyone better than them?" Forge asked, drawing her eyes back to him.

"Our melee instructor, David Carradine, and some of his assistants. They pose a bit more of a challenge," she offered, rolling her shoulder in a shrug. Kelly was very good â€" through practice and through her instincts. Aloe helped a fair amount, in this respect. Experience was always useful.

Forge's eyes narrowed, but a sharp shout from Chyler cut him off. Kelly turned to her squadmates. "Settle down!" she snapped at them, instantly quieting them. Her eyes shifted onto each of them, a light glare in place. "We are not at the academy. We are in public. We are not in a bar, and this isn't leave to be as disruptive as you like. Understood?"

They all looked at each other nervously, then back to her. "We didn't mean for it to get so out of hand," Chyler finally offered, "We just. . . What 'class' of soldier do you think is most effective, ma'am?" Kelly almost physically recoiled at the 'ma'am'.

"The one able to do anything the situation calls for. And don't call me 'ma'am' â€" I'm not your leader," she replied, a touch curtly, but then softened the scolding with a half-smile, "I'm hardly fit to lead a squad. Teach, train, perhaps, but not lead."

Thankfully, the waitress came back then, saving her from their replies, at least for a few moments. Apparently April had ordered an entrée â€" a large basket of potato wedges with garlic and sea salt on them, if she was right â€" and told the group that they could have some. Kelly helped herself, setting aside her korobela for now.

It was a few minutes before Forge nudged her. With a quiet sigh, she turned to the admittedly handsome man.

"You don't do yourself credit, you know," he told her. She offered a shrug. "Seriously. The best leaders are people like you. You might not realize it, but you would be a great officer."

"Perhaps," Kelly allowed, "But I don't want to send anyone to their deaths. I'd much rather be a teammate, and not the team leader."

The witch was glad when her team â€" plus their chaperone â€" let the subject drop, instead delving into a discussion of tactics. How, Kelly wasn't quite sure, but it did prove to be fruitful for Hastati. Forge watched all of them, a sort of bemused look on his face, as if he didn't quite understand them.

After they had eaten, they went to the local points-exchange store â€" Churchill's Surplus, named so in spite of the fact most of it _wasn't_ surplus goods. As Kelly was wont to do, she wandered over to the weapons section, looking over the proprietor's small melee weapons â€" the knives, mostly. She almost missed Forge following her, also examining the knives.

"That one would suit you." The witch followed Forge's pointing finger, examining the blade in question. Kelly did like the look of it, but she knew little of knife fighting, despite her desire to learn. She told her chaperone as much, and earned a smirk. "Well, you're in luck," he informed her, "Because I'm a pretty decent hand at knife fighting. How willing are you to learn?"

Kelly was almost certain her eyes were wide. None of the other instructors â€" or even her father â€" were willing to teach her. Then this man came along, and offered to do so? It almost seemed too good. "What would you want in return?" she asked, falling back on caution.

Forge's smirk broadened. "Well, for starters you can call me John." She felt her face contort slightly, reflecting her confusion. She hadn't even addressed him specifically â€" how could he know she would use 'Forge' or his rank, Lance Corporal, instead of his first name?

"You call most of your squad by their last names," the man offered, "Secondly. . .You have to do your best. No holding back with me, got it?"

The witch thought over the offer, despite her eagerness to just say 'yes' and leap at it. Not holding back could be extraordinarily dangerous, for both parties. Kelly found that she didn't mind as much as she probably ought to.

"Alright, John," she finally agreed, glancing back at the knife, "I'll let you teach me." The witch looked back at him just in time to

see the smirk shift into something more predatory.

Oh, dear. Why do I feel as if I just stepped into a trap?

****AN: **Remember: QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ARE WELCOME! Even if you give an anon review, I still appreciate any sort of feedback!**

7. Been Around For a Million Years

****AN: **Sorry this took so long to upload. Had to fix a few things, and I've been otherwise occupied in real life, though I doubt that my excuses are of any interest to any of you. Mostly an introspective chapter for Aloe/Kelly.**

****Chapter Seven: Been Around For a Million Years****

The reason Kelly had felt as if she had stepped into a trap, is because she pretty much had. John was taking the opportunity to be as close as physically possible, and was. . . flirting. The witch sighed, only regretting her decision a little bit. She had a bit of trouble trying to figure out what to do with John's undesired "mostly undesired" attentions, but she certainly wasn't going to go to Orenski or Silva about them, let alone any of the female instructors. Or worse, her father. That wouldn't end well on any account, let alone on John's.

A true frown flickered onto her face. Kelly had been very purposefully not-thinking about Aloe or her past as a witch. What little research she had been able to conduct on Earth's past while off of Earth indicated that there was no magic here "wherever here was in comparison to where she had come from, where she had died.

Still, Aloe had left behind a child "adopted, but still her own" that Kelly had found no records of. She was almost positive that magic did not exist here, beyond her and her abilities to heal. There was nothing to say that it did, and nearly everything to say that it didn't. (Aloe had set forth plans for revealing themselves "in a limited capacity, of course" that were well underway by the time she had been ki-died. By the time she had died.)

Not to mention Kelly didn't want to consider some of her. . . skills. Their origin, that is. Aloe had some close quarter abilities, but not to this extent. Then, of course, there was the matter of her dreams. Their similarity to her visions of Voldemort were unsettling, though they were seemingly benign, beyond being centered on her being a soldier, on being taller and stronger and faster. Were they what pushed her magic to have her be better? But "if they were, then where were they from? Did she have some subconscious feeling of inadequacy? Or was it from the illnesses?

Bah. Kelly doubted that she would find out anytime soon. Her duty, in this new life she had been granted by whatever powers may be, was to protect "as it had been, and as it always would be. If it meant killing, then so be it. She was a soldier, she had always been a soldier. (Kelly ignored the traitorous little whisper in the back of her head that insisted, 'No, no "you're a survivor. Not a soldier, a survivor!_', because it was wrong. Survivors didn't protect others "they cared only for themselves. Voldemort had

been a survivor. She wasn't. She _wasn't_.)

Kelly's abilities were bittersweet. Some of those at the Academy were â€" dare she say â€" jealous of her abilities. Her own squad may have been, if she wasn't working so hard to get them close to her level. The once-witch was doing no such favours to those outside of her squad. Except, perhaps John, but he hardly counted. He wasn't a student, he was already a soldier.

Still. The dreams that plagued her with increasing frequency were almost concerning, but. . . perhaps they were to be expected. Aloe knew war, and Kelly had seen the effects of Insurrectionist attacks. Dreams of humans dying was nothing new. It was the people beside her that drew her concern. John. Sam. Fred. William, Anton, Daisy, Kurt, dozens of names and faces of comrades that she _knew_ in her dreams, but didn't in reality. It took her writing the names in a second journal â€" not her 'work' one â€" for her to even attribute names to faces and sometimes even _numbers._ Who would go by a number? It seemed so out of place, even in the military.

Oh, there she had gone again. Thinking as if her dreams were reality. They _weren't_. It was probably just her brain coming up with peculiar and out-there comparisons. Again. Kelly huffed in anger, nearly throwing one of her many books across the room. Instead, she placed it on her desk, flopping onto her bed with a small sigh of relief. Her entire situation was unbelievable. She should just be grateful that she was alive. She _tried_ to beâ€" it's just. . . The need for answers nearly burned in her.

Why here?

Why now?

Was she supposed to do something for 'them'?

Was this just a second chance at life?

Why let her keep her memories?

Why give her a semblance of her magic?

Why place her in a sickly body?

Why give her these strange instances of almost-knowing?

Why give her a family?

Why take away that family in another war?

Why were people still fighting?

Why was she so strong physically now?

Where were the other magicals?

Was there any magic here at all?

_ . . . Did they miss her?_

What happened to the people she left behind?

Did the people she loved die peacefully?

The questions tormented her mind, no answers in sight.

This was the uncertainty she had tried to avoid, in not thinking of Aloe, in not touching Aloe's memories. If not for how happy she was being alive again, Kelly could have called this 'Hell'. Knowing nothing of her family and friends, not being able to rejoin her parents, Sirius, Remus, and countless others. . .

But this wasn't hell. This was. . . This was Kelly's 'next great adventure', so to speak. Such a trite sentiment, but it was what sprang to mind. This is why she dwelled on the present and tried to help her people. If war was to happen, she would have them ready. If they wished to die a good death â€" for others, as she had â€" she would help them stave that off until it was a necessity.

This is what Kelly sought to do. She would make them strong. She would be strong. And she would live â€" if not for herself, then for the people she fought for.

She could live with that.

****AN:**** Question and comments are always welcome! I hope you enjoyed this chapter :D

8. An Honest Man

****AN: ****Thank you, ****George****, for reviewing, and thanks to all the people who favorite/followed!

****Chapter Eight: An Honest Man****

In spite of Kelly's assistance, her squad didn't always listen to her. She knew that. Her father knew that. Orenski knew that. Problem was, Kelly also knew that Sully opting to hack into ONI was likely going to track unwanted attention to the team. (_ONI is trouble_, her father insisted, _You steer clear of them, you hear?_) Even the fleeting sense of recognition when she saw the soldier clad in green armour wasn't worth attracting that sort of attention to her.

It would figure that the next day was a meeting between Kelly and the general, and it would figure that would be the day everything would be going to hell in a handbasket decorated with bits of blood and glass. _Gallows humour. Akin to an apple, but with insanity instead of a doctor._ When the alarms had begun to ring, she had been talking to her father, listening to him congratulate her on just how much Hastati had improved in the time he had provided. He had sent a recommendation on ahead, ready for when Kelly graduated, so she could get into training soldiers if she so desired. Then, John had listened as she had laid out her plans to remain with Hastati after graduation, only to explain that _That's not how it works, Kelly. You'll be graduating at a different time than they are, despite their scores. You wouldn't even be staying with Cadet Orenski._

Her dreams had lied again, then. They had displayed people â€" teens, mostly â€" being trained and remaining in their squads for the most part. But, before Kelly could speak â€" could question â€" the alarms

had gone off and the general had ordered her to find her squad for evacuation, something flickering in his dark eyes. _He knows what is happening. He knows why the alarms are ringing, knows that something is amiss. He has to. He's _the_ General, the head of Corbulo Academy,_ Kelly thought, even as she bolted through the halls of the academy. People were screaming and gunfire was echoing even before she had reached her squad.

Orenski was directing Hastati towards the Tether â€" to the orbital elevator â€" through the crowds of soldiers and academy attendees. Kelly shifted through people, arriving at her team leader. From there, things began to blur, time consuming each development (that girl from Fretensis Squad, Solkolova, Chalnova, Tchalinkova, _something along those lines_, completely bypassed everyone else in the line, but she died â€" fell â€" when the Tether was broken) as it occurred, each being filed away as she manoeuvred her shell-shocked squad back through the crowds of soldiers and to-be-soldiers.

The screams of men and women falling and thudding onto the roof of Corbulo and onto the surrounding grounds would be something that haunted Kelly until the end of her days â€" perhaps beyond, as well. She could do nothing to help them (_As Aloe hadn't been able to help in the early days of the War_) and trudged on, locking away each emotion, each thought or feeling that would be a detriment to her fighting. (She couldn't do anything to stop the protectiveness, though. Wouldn't. That was what made her a not-survivor.) Gunmetal green eyes picked out the warriors falling, the human screams fading to even her ears.

"It's so quiet," Lasky noted shakily. Kelly made a gesture to silence him, knowing that if it was so quiet. . . The fighting was largely over. Occasionally, a yell reached her perked ears, only to be swiftly cut off. They were combing the Academy even now. The once-witch wished she could protect all sides of the group, but â€" well, she couldn't. At least she could guide them away from danger and to their weapons lockers. More than once, the group almost ran afoul of some creature â€" some _alien_ â€" that moved quietly, but not enough. Kelly could _hear_ its equipment humming in the near-silence of the Academy, especially since she concentrated on anything that could affect their survival.

"How the hell did we not notice just how much better you are?" Walter hissed, agitated and. . . Hmm. Exhausted. Upset, of course â€" grieving. He had friends outside of Hastati, unlike her. Kelly cast him a brief glance, brows raised with mild incredulity. This wasn't exactly the time to be inquiring after the obvious, after all.

Orenski scoffed, "She didn't _want_ you to notice. She practices in her spare time, when she isn't holed up in her room writing in her journal or talking to her father." The woman had a point, Kelly admitted to herself. If they had noticed to the extent she had been better than them â€" at least in the beginning â€" it could have discouraged them from improving themselves. Could have just as easily been the opposite, but. . . She hadn't wanted to take the risk at the time. Seems a bit silly in hindsight, however.

"Shh," Kelly whispered as they came close to the lockers containing their gear. She heard the light footsteps of one of the aliens, then a soft 'buzz'-like noise. Its footsteps faded, but the humming did

not. She closed her eyes, keeping track of it as it moved closer, then further away. Walter shifted, then stilled as Orenski gripped his arm tightly. Kelly silently pulled a piece of rubble â€" a pebble, really â€" from her pocket, biding her time. The humming continued to fade, finally leaving her range of hearing. The pebble went back to her pocket, her fingers brushing over the knife in her boot for a moment. With a brief shake of her head, Kelly led the group on, to the room containing their equipment, bypassing the patrolling alien.

"Get the lockers open," Kelly hissed to Orenski as Lasky and herself went to the door's control panel, setting out a distress signal. There was a brief scuffle â€" further down the hall, a scream echoed. Hastati as a whole paused, listening. Glass crashed â€" their bunk doors, Kelly thought, as that was the closest source of so much glass. The door quickly hissed shut. The witch â€" once-witch? Healer? â€" darted to her locker, punching in its code and pulling it open, then yanking on her gear.

Orenski let out a frustrated yell, immediately slapping her hand over her mouth with wide eyes darting towards the door. Silence rang out. "I can't access the live ammunition," the squad leader hissed after a long moment, "Kelly, do you â€"

The witch shook her head. "We can pick up weapons, then. We need to â€" _Clang._ Everyone's eyes darted towards the door. _Clang_. Dust â€" dry wall? â€" shook down from the wall above the door. Kelly yanked her knife out of her boot, gesturing for everyone to hide. JJ and Walter hid behind the nearest lockers along with her, while Thomas, Chyler, April, and Michael ducked behind the other row. She glanced at Walter â€" at the fire extinguisher in his hands â€" then listened carefully as the door was actually beat down by the alien. Strong. How quickly can it move? Faster than a human? Faster than me? Most of the team is closer to the door. I could distract it. Maybe. Or we might all die, because I'm not fast enough to avoid the creature, and it would chase down the rest. I don't know anything about its internal organs, or sensitive spots. If humanoid â€" if biped, I'd say that vulnerable points are similar to a human's, but there's a risk that they aren't. Of course, that's a risk that will have to be taken either way. _

Kelly reached out, gently taking the fire extinguisher from Walter's hands, gesturing for the pair to be silent and to be ready. She waited until they nodded, even as she heard a harsh whisper from the other side of the room â€" Its right there, Thomas told his group. It can hear you, Kelly thought anxiously, shifting around to look toward the front of the room. Sparks fell onto the cloaked alien â€" Cloak. Like Aloe's invisibility cloak, but noisier. â€" revealing its position to her. With a heave, she chucked the canister towards it, flinching slightly as something glowing darted from the suddenly uncloaked alien, imbedding itself in the canister and causing it to explode in a flurry of white as its contents depressurized.

The healer darted forward, knife in hand, hoping that the alien didn't have another throwing knife of any sort. There seemed to be a lot of gaps in its armour, ones that she quickly took advantage of. Death by a thousand paper cuts, if need be. It cried out in what seemed like anger after the first six of her rabbit-punch strikes were diverted by some sort of force field â€" A ****shield****? Technology is that advanced? Perhaps for them. â€" and the seventh

scored a fair-sized wound on the inside of its elbow. Even its voice was utterly alien, warbling oddly even as its lower mandibles spread it what seemed like a challenge. Gunmetal green eyes tracked its hands and feet, not watching it head for cues that may confuse her (_Alien. It had completely different training. Intimidating thought, _Kelly admitted to herself.).

"Go!" she growled to Hastati. They didn't move. The alien unleashed some sort of white glowing sword, steam rising off of it menacingly. _Bloody fucking hell._ It was nearly as long as she was tall, and by the way it held the sword, it was very proficient with the weapon. Kelly had _never_ needed to battle a swordsman before, though Aloe had some meagre training in that aspect. A shiver wracked down her spine.

"_Go!"_ she barked out again, just as she darted (hopefully) under the alien's guard. The sword hissed, skittering over her armour, causing it to bubble and crack from the heat. She had felt that heat through the armour's layers, down to her sinew. _Very, __**very**__ dangerous._ The members of Hastati closest to the door nearly fell out at the scrambled to follow her order (_finally_), leaving her to lure the alien away from JJ and Walter so they could escape. It began to turn, making Kelly growl thunderously, attacking its exposed side viciously. Her blade sunk deeply, wrenching a howl of pain from the creature. The boys darted past the struggling duo, towards relative safety. The sword flicked towards Kelly again, dangerously quick. This time, Kelly managed to avoid all of it, though it made her hair burn at points, even while in her braid. _Long hair is an indulgence,_ she knew. Hopefully she wouldn't pay for it today. Another swipe â€" this one doubled back, striking across her face and sending her helmet clattering to the floor as it cut the straps. Agony lit up across her face, a ragged yell wrenching itself from her lips. The alien seemed to laugh.

_Fine. __**Fine.**_ You want it to be that way? You got it, you cockbite._ Kelly pulled her lips back into a snarl, letting the agony fuel her rage. _This was __**her**__ planet, __**her**__ people, and they __**dared**__ to come and slaughter what was hers? _She lashed out again, scoring a long gash across its armour and arm, sending purple-blue blood across the floor and herself. Its laugh cut into a howl, which in turn was abruptly cut off as it froze. An armoured hand â€" a _human_ hand â€" was wrapped around its throat. Both dropped after a long moment of silence.

A shudder ran through Kelly's form, her rage now lacking a ready outlet. The (_familiar_) green-armoured man with **117** emblazoned upon his chestplate stared at her wordlessly, Hastati peaking almost fearfully from behind him. "Oh my god, Kelly! Are you alright? We tried to hurry â€" April exclaimed, being the first to dart around to her. Kelly forced the snarl off of her face, casting her eyes down to the alien. _Severed the spinal column. Might still be alive in mind._ She bent down, turning its head. It blinked at her, helpless rage in its cat-like eyes. _Green. Like mine._ She lifted her blade, and sank it through its eye socket. It seemed to shiver, then fell completely still. _All creatures of Earth and its colonies had weak points behind the eyes, where the nerves connected to the brain, if they were vertebrates. This alien seems to be no different._

"K-Kelly?" Orenski asked hesitantly.

"'M fine," the witch grunted, reaching up to brush a hand over the rapidly numbing portion of her face and neck. A near-straight line of cauterized flesh was split from just above the corner of her mouth to past the bottom of her ear. It would have taken off the top half of her head, if she hadn't moved. Another shudder. She had been so close to dying. If John hadn't given her those lessons. . . her chances would have dropped significantly.

"Get your weapons," 117 stated, voice a low (_familiar_) growl.

"Th-The lockers â€" we don't have the code," April stuttered, turning wide brown eyes onto the soldier, even as Kelly moved over to said lockers. 117 followed, then _ripped_ the door from its hinges. The healer murmured a quick _thanks_, pulling out one of the pistols and some of its ammunition. Most â€" all â€" of the others on Hastati grabbed MA5s â€" assault rifles â€" and their corresponding ammunition. She debated doing the same for a moment, but knew she was far better at aiming with a pistol of any sort.

"He said he's called 'Chief'," Lasky muttered to her, "He said we're the only ones left alive on the _entire planet!_" The. . . entire planet?

"W's th'gener'l evac'd?" she slurred out, turning her gaze to the Chief. He gave a shrug, rolling his shoulders. _No. I don't think he was,_ she thought, rage brimming her core. Oh, she was grateful of the time she had with her family this time around, but. . . that didn't make her any less angry at the ones who took them away.

"You good, Cadet Black?" the soldier inquired at her silence.

"Fine," she grunted, then gestured to the seared gash along her face, rolling her eyes emphatically.

"We'll be heading to the warthogs. Your squad claims you can drive," 117 stated flatly. A nod from her. As Aloe, she hadn't driven very much, if at all, but here, as Kelly? It was the closest she could get to flying without a permit for it, which she had planned to get after Corbulo. The likelihood of that happening seemed significantly smaller, now.

The chief took them on a route winding away from the Tether. As they bypassed bodies, Kelly snatched up what ammo and grenades she could, including a spare pistol â€" not an M6D, but a magnum from one of the ODS's corpses. She also grabbed what dogtags she could, out of respect. Her squad helped as much as they could, though the chief seemed to ignore their actions. The pace he set was steady, ground eating (and _familiar_). Soon enough, they were outside. Occasionally, something flashed in the healer's peripherals, making her twitchy. _War never changes,_ she thought with grim humour.

They reached a warthog, a familiar one. Pink flashed out of the corner of her eye, a colour she remembered seeing through windows. Her pistols snapped out, hitting the shooter within three barks of sound, hitting one alien â€" more birdlike, this time â€" in its skull, a feat even she was impressed by â€" as Michael cried out in pain. She knew without looking that he would be pulled into cover by

Thomas. Her eyes flickered over the academy's grounds, searching for any sign of movement, her pistols ready. (_The magnum had more of a kick than she was used to, but she liked it. The kick and the weight felt right._) Two more of the bird-like beings were on a rooftop. She took care of them, as well, carefully taking her shots. A flurry of brilliant green (echoes from Aloe and the dreams threatened to take over, but she shoved them away) came from the Academy itself. Relatively small and stout beings in red and orange came out, bizarre barks and yelps falling from their maws, small semi-circles being the source of green.

"Get the 'hog ready! I'll draw them off!" the chief ordered, darting away before any of them could protest. With a prayer to anything listening, Kelly began to bark out orders â€" this was _war_ and none of her squad were ready for it. They still were shocked by being the only ones left capable of sending a distress signal.

"Orenski, Silva, get suppressive fire on wha'ever comes close. Lasky, check Sully's wound. JJ, Vick, make sure nothin' sneaks up on us." Kelly herself moved to the warthog, removing the bodies from the vehicle. It contained an ODS'T â€" on the gun, with another magnum that she appropriated alongside her tags â€" one of the Academy soldiers â€" tags were taken, eyes were shut, body laid out beside the ODS'T's â€" and. . . her father. A full-body shudder ran through her without any impendence. Tags taken â€" placed around her neck â€" as was his pocket watch â€" silver or pewter, something passed down for ages â€" went under her armour, into a pocket. He was placed beside his soldiers, eyes respectfully closed and a kiss placed on his bloodied forehead. _Goodbye, Father. Rest in peace with Mother, please._

Determination converted Kelly's white-hot anger to ice. She hoisted herself into the driver's seat, starting up the modified 'hog with a growl of its engine. Hastati clambered into the vehicle, Silva up front with her while the remainder crammed into the back between the gun and the front seats. It was a bit of a tight fit, as 117 nearly dove into the back, making the 'hog groan and dip under his weight. _Heavy. 250 kilos? Maybe more?_

"Punch it!" the soldier ordered. Kelly punched it, tires squealing slightly as she fishtailed away from the Academy.

"Evac point?" she called back.

"Pelican drop point in the woods, eight clicks out," he replied. That would be. . . Landing Zone Alpha-3, then. Kelly sent the 'hog into a slide, letting the siding hit one of the smaller aliens as it emerged from the trees. The bright circle on its wrist â€" a hand-held shield of some sort â€" popped, and it flew into a tree with a vicious cacophony of snapping. She heard more than one whimper from Hastati, though Silva's was most prominent.

A bolt of green flew out of the woods, larger than any such thing thus far. Try as she might, Kelly wasn't able to avoid it, though slamming on the brakes meant it simply sent the vehicle rolling instead of killing all of them. Perhaps all but the armoured one, anyway. As it was, Kelly was pretty sure she broke her wrist â€" the left one, the mostly dominant one â€" upon landing, as well as bruising her ribs on the side of the warthog and the tree she tumbled into. A quick glanced showed most of Hastati was alright, though

Silva was cradling her right hand and Sully was sprawled on his back. Vickers was hovering over him, while Lasky was doing the same next to Silva, and Orenski was in a crouch, MA5B in hand as she scanned the woods.

"Keep going," 117 (_John_, her memory-dreams murmured insistently) growled, "I'll catch up." Kelly took a fortifying breath, mentally shaking away the dreams, and gathered up her squadmates, forcing them to _move_. She didn't know how long until the pelican would leave, but they _would_ make it in time. They had to.

They made it a fair distance before the chief caught up with them â€" the squad was taking a minute breather in one of the shelters located on the paintball fields. It was a ten minute walk to LZ A-3, fifteen with Sully's leg being as hurt as it was. If they helped him along â€" half-carrying him â€" it might be less.

"You all okay?" 117-_John_ asked, gold visor scanning over the group. Kelly's spine stiffened as she nodded curtly, lips pursed. Silva let out a low yell as Lasky pulled a twig from her hand, but the younger woman grunted an affirmative, as did most of Hastati. They all had blood and dirt and sweat on them, as was wont to happen during battle, or even fleeing for their lives as they were. "Let's keep moving, then. Keep close." And they set off again, adrenaline keeping them going for now. _Things could be a lot worse, _Kelly mused,_ At least all of us are alive._

Another roar split the air just as they reached a small cliff. Kelly saw most of the team hesitate. "You 'member how we practiced fallin'?" she asked them, eyes darting over them to land on Sully. His leg would make this the most difficult for him â€" not impossible. Her wrist was a touch. . . ah, problematic, as well, but she was quite used to operating with broken limbs (as Aloe) or in pain (as both Aloe and Kelly). She doubted most of the others were.

Still, nods and affirmatives were given, and her squad began to drop down. A quick glance behind showed an aura of brilliant green â€" _Advada Kedavra _green â€" was fast approaching. Kelly looked to the Chief. "Did y'need anythin', sir?" she inquired. He gestured to the grenade bandolier she had snagged from a corpse, currently looped around her hips. She unbuckled it, handing it over without protest. "Don' take too long," she stated, moving to the edge of the cliff.

"Wouldn't dream of it," Kelly just barely heard him mutter. A smile â€" more of a smirk â€" flickered across her lips. She leapt, cradling her arm to her abdomen carefully.

Hastati Squad half-ran, half-jogged towards the evacuation point at the behest of Kelly. Sully occasionally whimpered, but he held it together better than he would have if she hadn't gotten her hands on him. Hadn't beat him to near unconsciousness each time they sparred for her 'skill assessments', a free-for-all between Hastati as a whole once everyone had opted to join. _Pain is a reminder â€" let it flow through you, do not let_ _it disable you. Do not try to stop it. That will make it worse. Just. . . Accept the pain for what it is â€" a warning, a sign, that you are alive. That you can still fight. Do not let that pain consume you._

Kelly was confident they would escape. That the chief would, as well. She felt like it was in their nature to survive, to help others survive. Perhaps that was merely wishful thinking, but. . . she believed it. The heavy footsteps â€" _familiar, and yet not_ â€" of the chief made the healer relax imperceptibly. She had been hoping he would catch up soon, and he had. It didn't take long for them to finally arrive at LZ A-3, for them to meet up with _087_ and _104_. The latter number was associated with the name _Fred_ and _Frederic_, but the first. . . the first is the number she had associated with _self_ and _Kelly_, yet there they stood, clearly separate. As if she needed more proof that she was not _087_ and that she didn't truly know 117 or 104.

The question was. . . How were they connected? How was Kelly gaining access to 087's memories? She shook her head, keeping her eyes away from 087's visor, discomfited by the soldier and their connection. She sat herself in the pelican, waiting for it to leave, attempting to search her mind for the connection to her. . . to 087. Kelly gave a quiet sigh of relief as the aircraft began to lift off.

'_I don't understand. She looks like me. If she's my clone, how did she survive this long? She should have degraded __**years**__ ago, according to the doctor.'_

_What the bloody __**fucking**__ hell?_

****AN:**** Leave a comment, yeah? Questions are welcome, obviously. You spot anything wrong, tell me!

So. Yeah. Hope this didn't cause spoilers for anyone, but I _did_ warn everyone in previous ANs. If you didn't read them, well, that's your own fault, isn't it?

JJ was originally supposed to die, even in this AU, but Kelly-Aloe was like _he_ _liiiiives!_, so . . . I just said 'okay'. But, hey, the Circinius IV arc is done! Now onto the interim between Circinius and Reach, which in all should cover. . . eh, 2526 - 2552 â€" twenty-six years total. Most of it will be skimmed over, important bits being included in some way, shape, or form, either in the next few chapters or as flashbacks/memories/dreams as the story continues.

Combat orientated chapters will tend to be longer, but don't rely on that. They'll also take a touch longer to get out, as writing combat is in no way my specialty.

9. The Sound of Their Own Screams

****AN:**** Thanks to those of you who chose to review, and for all of you who have so far favorite! I'm sorry if my first aid in this chapter is inaccurate. If you know the proper way, please tell me!

****Chapter Nine: The Sound of Their Own Scream****

It took a. . . fair amount of time to reach their 'safe haven', the UNSC light frigate, _Nevermore_. _In those hours, Kelly did her damndest to find the source of the 'leak' between her and her body's potential original. (_And didn't __**that**__ make for a confusing sentence?_) Once she had found it, the efforts to 'plug' or close it

were met with failure.

"Let me see your hand." Kelly started, casting her attention out-ward again. 104 (_Fred_) was kneeling in front of her, a medkit on the floor next to him, and her arm was already offered into the space between them.

"It's fractured," she stated, "At the scaphoid and the radius." The burn along her face cracked, allowing blood to well up, then slide down her cheek and neck. 104 looked up, a frown that she could almost _see_ behind his visor as his fingers fluttered briefly, as if in agitation. 087 â€" the other Kelly, the _original_ Kelly â€" stood, making her way over to them.

"Did you need help?" 087-Kelly asked, directing the question to 104-Fred, visor directed at her fellow soldier.

"Probably," 104 stated simply, then turned to Kelly â€" the one with Aloe, not the one with armour â€" and said, "You mind?" She shook her head, even though her eyes darted between the two uncertainly.

'_It's almost like she's afraid of us. But why would she be? John said she had no problems with __**him**__, hell, she had no problems facing an __**Elite**__','_ 087's thoughts trailed into Kelly's, causing the witch to grimace as the lines between them blurred faintly, memories of 087's conversation with 117 hitching a ride on those words. At least their mental voices seemed to be different. _Felt _different, anyway.

_Not __**afraid**__, not of you. Afraid of what may happen, _ Kelly thought, a mental sigh accompanying her musing.

'_. . . __**What**__?'

Kelly grimaced again as the other's fingers tightened briefly on her chin, gauntlet digging into her flesh. Had 087 actually heard that? The connection wasn't only one-way?

'_You. . . We â€" We can __**hear**__ each other?' _And _that_ was a confirmation if Kelly-Aloe ever heard one.

_Yes, though it seems spotty, _ Kelly replied, mental voice quiet, _I never heard you before all of __**this**__ happened, though I did have. . . dreams._

A barely-there tremor seemed to run through 087, causing 104 to shift slightly towards her, in spite of his careful prodding at Kelly's wrist.

'_Of my training?'_ 087 wondered.

_Of __**being**__ you. Of being Kelly-087 of Camp Lacedaemon instead of Cadet Kelly Black, daughter of General John Black and Eva Black, who was sickly and near death from age seven to fourteen. _ Kelly didn't add in the primary difference between them â€" namely _Aloe _â€" for one simple reason: she was _already_ different. She didn't know what the other would do if she offered up Aloe and her magic.

"I'm going to try to straighten out your wrist, alright?" 104 said interrupting Kelly and Kelly's silent exchange. Both glanced at each other, the clone finally nodding in acquiescence. The red-haired man's hand gently â€" but firmly â€" manipulated Kelly-Aloe's arm, resulting in spikes of pain that the woman had some difficulty in suppressing. She already knew that at least one noise had left her â€" a quiet whimper that she wasn't exactly proud of, but she wasn't ashamed of it, either.

'_Shhh. You'll be alright.'_ The fact that 087-Kelly somehow managed to mentally 'pet' Kelly-Aloe's mind was admittedly intimidating and disconcerting. Aloe hadn't exactly been a master with mental abilities like Legilimency and Occlumency, let alone when sharing a bond such as this, so the fact that a muggle soldier in a realm without magic could. . . Well, that was just as disconcerting as the unsealable link between them.

104-Fred began to wrap her arm as 087 secured thin gauze over the wound on Kelly's face, crooning through their connection like one would to calm a bird. The once-witch sighed, just letting them do as they liked. (_She already lived a life. Her entire family was dead now. The Humans were at war __**again**__ â€" hardly a surprise. And there were dozens of __**Spartans**__ out there, not just 104, 087, and 117. And she wouldn't mind resting for a bit. If Original-Kelly and Fred-104 meant her harm, would they really be treating her injuries?_)

"How long until we can actually sleep?" Vickers suddenly asked, causing her eyes to flicker over to him. In a deliberate show, Kelly settled back into her seat, free arm draped across her abdomen, and shuttered her eyes, chin dropping onto her chest. She tried to ignore the odd looks she â€" and the soldiers â€" were receiving from Hastati, instead concentrating on the pain of her arm and her ribs, keeping her breathing as steady as possible.

"How long until we reach. . . wherever we're going?" Silva corrected.

"ETA three hours, forty-two minutes," 117 offered, finally turning to face the cadets grouped towards the front of the pelican.

Do you have a countdown on your visor? Kelly wondered, directing the question to 087.

_'Yes. The supervising A.I. â€" Virginia â€" has been updating our objectives as she's able.' __There was a fragmented slew of fragmented memories that accompanied 087's reply, concerning varying A.I. that the Spartans had worked or trained with.__

"Where are we going?" Orenski asked, her voice weary and uncertain.

"The UNSC light frigate _Nevermore_ is currently stationed behind Veritas, waiting for us." Veritas being one of the three moons, the furthest out. Fides was the closest, and Vis being the 'middle distance' one.

"How many other people survived?" Silva had been the one to ask that. No answer was forthcoming. "_How many people survived?_" the youngest woman demanded more forcefully.

"We don't know," 117 stated after another long moment, "From where this squad was deployed, only you seven were recovered alive."

In other words, not very many. "But there were people picked up from the Tether, right?" Lasky asked, voice wavering. The witch's chest tightened briefly, sorrow building.

"Maybe." Another not-answer. Kelly sent a vague query to 087 through their link, letting her eyes sliver open.

'_We really don't know. We just get sent on missions. If it isn't relevant, we don't find out until the after the fact,'_ 087 replied, one of her shoulders rolling in a shrug.

Oh. That's a shame. Of course, Kelly had known nearly from the beginning that a massive loss of life was going to occur. The aliens hadn't even hesitated when slaughtering humans, even if they didn't have weapons. Even if they weren't soldiers.

'_You were a cadet at Corbulo, right? That's where John had been going,' _087 half-asked.

_Yes. I always wanted to be a soldier, even before my dreams of you started, _Kelly replied, a tilt appearing on her lips. It was true. Even as Aloe, she had some desire to be a soldier or a police officer.

'_. . . Aloe?'_

Kelly really should have known better than to even try keeping a secret from someone whose mind was connected to her own.

****AN: **Questions and comments are encouraged, so please leave a review!**

10. Songs of Truth

****AN: **So many positive reactions! :D Your reviews make me very happy :) Here's another talky chapter!**

****Chapter Ten: Songs of Truth****

'_Who is Aloe?'_ 087 demanded, worry seeping through their bond. 104 had, at some point, moved off, having dealt with the majority of her injuries, and 087 had settled somewhat near Kelly.

Kelly hesitated for a long moment, trying to evaluate how much she could actually trust 087.

'_You're __**me**__. Why would I betray you?'_ the soldier replied, sounding offended. After another moment of contemplation, Kelly caved to her desire for someone else to just _know_. It didn't matter if 087 believed her, just that she knew.

Aloe Potter was who I believed I was before waking up as Kelly Black. Aloe was born hundreds of years ago, and Aloe died hundreds of years ago. Kelly sent her original a few flashes of relevant memory " or tried to. Shoving the pieces towards their bond seemed to do

the trick, thankfully.

'_So. . . You believe you were reincarnated?'_ 087-Kelly asked hesitantly, grasping at the memory fragments with the same absurd ease that she had thus far displayed.

In simple terms? Yes. In complicated terms? Maybe. I don't rightly know one way or another. Which was completely true. Most cases of reincarnation â€" of souls or magical cores being 're-issued', or reused by Magic â€" the reincarnation never retained the memories of the previous incarnation. Perhaps they held personality traits, but memories? No. Not that it was terribly common to be discovered. There were only six documented cases of a reincarnation of soul and core together, seven of core only, and three of soul only, if Aloe recalled correctly.

'_So. . . You __**aren't**__ me, despite inhabiting a clone of me?'_ 087 inquired, confusion seeping through their bond.

I don't know, Kelly replied bluntly, _But we have a bond, one that allows me to see some of your memories. I wish I knew more about what it would mean, but I am far from omniscient, especially concerning involuntary bonds like this._

'_Hm.'_

Aloe grimaced faintly as her injuries gave a particularly vicious throb.

_Why are you even trusting what I'm telling you? I could be lying. You know virtually nothing about me, _Kelly abruptly demanded of her original, a faint sour note to her 'voice'.

A soft scoff, barely audible to Kelly, emanated from the still and heavily armoured 087. _'Didn't we already establish that our connection was far from one-sided? I've been having dreams of __**you**__ and of __**Aloe**__ since I was taken. Granted, Aloe's life was something that was dreamt of far more rarely â€" I only recall bits and pieces from one or two Aloe-dreams.'_

Of course. That would make sense. It had been foolish of Kelly to believe otherwise.

'_How much of my memories carried over?'_ 087 inquired, perhaps sensing Kelly's reluctance to continue on that particular subject.

_A lot of subconscious things. Strategies, fighting forms, how to use weapons, from what I've noticed. Aloe. . . Aloe hadn't exactly been so widespread in her muggle learning. _Kelly offered fragments of memories of what she had noticed, of when she had realized that what she knew wasn't exactly _normal_ or easily excused, even being a general's daughter.

The tug of gravity told the witch â€"the _clone_ â€" that they were nearing at least one of the moons. Most likely their target, as the other two shouldn't be in their path to Veritas.

'_We're about to dock,' 087 explained, _'And I hear we're all due for debriefing. Your group must have been one of the few that

actually encountered the aliens before being exfiltrated.'

—
Encountered and survived was left unsaid, but Kelly heard it clearly. She flinched slightly at the unintended reminder, sitting up, immediately digging through a pocket. Dozens of dogtags were withdrawn, the clinking drawing the attention of everyone.

"When did you get those?" 117 asked, his voice a low growl.

"On our way to the extraction point. And to our weapons lockers, before we met you." Her eyes didn't stray from the bloodied tags, a frown marring her features. There were less than she would have preferred. From her other pocket, she withdrew her father's pocket watch and tags. _You can. . . you can have these, if you want them, _she offered her "sister? Original? Which was more appropriate?

'_Oh, don't start with that. You have been Kelly Black for longer than I was. He was more **your** _father than he was mine.' _Kelly fought back a grimace, still trying to get used to the feel of impressions of memories that weren't her own.

"You weren't supposed to stray," 117 stated flatly, unamused and unaware of the silent conversation between his Kelly and the cadet Kelly.

The cadet "ex-cadet?" refrained from saying 'You hadn't even noticed I was gone'. It wouldn't help at all, and she doubted he would appreciate the quip.

'_He would "just not from you, not yet,' _087 replied to the unspoken thought, sending her the impression of a smile.

'Not yet'. That implied that he would, eventually. But after what has happened. . . Kelly had no clue where she was going to end up. 087 "the witch gave a heavy mental sigh. _We need a better way to differentiate ourselves. I've been calling you '087', but it doesn't sit right, _she informed her counterpart as the pelican settled into the _Nevermore_'s docking bay.

'_Do we have three names?' _087 asked in curiosity, _'Like you did as Aloe?'

No. Though it would be terribly convenient, wouldn't it? the witch replied. She wasn't Aloe anymore, at least not so much that she would willingly use the name. And now with Kelly-087. . .

'_And something that won't be too hard to explain,' _the _Spartan_ mused, _'Fulmen? Sãrkãny? Drakon? Molniia? Eldingar?'

Each was accompanied by a flash of what they meant. The large majority meant 'lightning', though a few seemed to mean 'dragon'. Each was also met with a refusal.

"You coming, Ace?" Both women glanced over to Fred "104" both simultaneously, and unintentionally, quirking their heads to the side.

After a long moment "in which Kelly was wondering _why_ he had

called her 'Ace', but ultimately decided it didn't matter â€" the clone stood, following the male Spartan silently.

It would seem that she would be 'Ace' now â€" depending on how long she and Kelly-087 interacted. There were worse names.

****AN: ****You may have noticed it's been. . . nearly two months since my last update. The reason for that is the holidays, and my job being terminated due to the store I work at closing, and I have yet to find another job. I will continue updating, and I will do my damndest to do so in a somewhat timely manner.

In the meantime, please leave a review on the way out. It helps keep me motivated.

11. I've Been Around

****AN: ****So, I realized I hadn't actually mention this, but the title of this story is from the song 'Fury oh Fury' by Nico Vega. Chapters 1-5 have been lyrics from the same song, while 6-11 have been from 'Million Years' by Nico Vega. All of the chapters in FoF will follow the trend of titles from Nico Vega's songs.

****Chapter Eleven: I've Been Around****

The Nevermore was bustling with people. Three hundred, at least, near over-capacity for a light-frigate. The three Spartans not-so-subtly hemmed her in, Hastati trailing behind like puppies.

They're going to question your protectiveness, 'Ace' murmured.

'Who? Your squad?' Kelly asked in return, shifting slightly and drawing the other Spartans' attention.

Everyone. I'm just a cadet. You just met me. Hell, we share a **name**, Kelly. We share **genes**, we are â€" or **were** â€" biologically twins! If ONI catches on that we know about each other, if we can communicate like this, what will they do? My â€" **Our** father always said not to trust ONI, that they were bad news, to not even. . . Kelly â€" Ace trailed off, eyes casting themselves downwards.

There was a hitch in Kelly-087's step, but it vanished as soon as Ace noticed it. 'He. . . knew of ONI?' She could feel Kelly searching through her fragmented memory-dreams from Ace, a frown in place.

He was a general. Of course he knew of ONI. He seemed to know ONI well, simply judging by his warnings. There was a frown on her lips, Ace knew. There was a lot she didn't know about their father, or their mother. She had been with them perhaps fifteen years, losing Eva half way through. It was. . . disconcerting. She had never thought about it before, not seriously.

'You could ask, couldn't you?' Kelly inquired.

Ace started, reflexively looking up at the Spartan. Did she not realize. . .?

_Kelly. He was the head of Corbulo Academy. He. . . _

Without her permission, the memory of gently pulling his body out of the warthog surged forth, bleeding into Kelly's side of the link. The blood on Ace's hands burned, and the once-witch had to fight the urge to find the nearest restroom " or sink " to wash herself, to wash the blood off.

(But it would never go away. For all that Ace talked of being a protector, she hadn't been able to protect everyone dear to her.)

'_Oh. . .' _Kelly " 087 " whispered, sadness permeating their bond, '_That's. . . That, ah, sucks. Seriously. What about. . .'_ Ace got the impression of the word 'mother', albeit in more than one language. Interesting that she knew so many, even being raised by ONI.

_Dead. She was in Eridanus during the terrorist attacks years ago. Sixth year anniversary of her death is coming up, _ she replied, a grimace forming, then fading, _We would have been. . . fifteen. Doesn't seem so long ago, to be honest._

'_I'm sorry,' _Kelly said, a sigh barely audible, more seen in her shoulders incrementally lifting, then falling.

For what? You didn't kill either of our parents. The Insurrectionists and the aliens did. Kelly didn't answer, even as they drew to a stop outside of an infirmary.

"Get yourselves checked out," Kelly said out loud, '_We have to go elsewhere. If you need anything, call.'_

I don't need to be taken care of. I'm decades older than you, Ace gently reminded her originator.

'_Doesn't mean I don't want to help you, sister,'_ the Spartan replied simply. It was not a helpful statement, nor did it appear to be intended as such.

"W-What about you?" Lasky asked, a frown in place.

"We are going to debrief," John-117 stated flatly, already turning to leave with his team.

"Well, alright, then, Chief," Orenski muttered a touch sourly. Ace directed a surprised glance towards her.

"You shouldn't be surprised. I saw no evidence of injuries on any of them," the weakened witch provided, letting her voice colour with her surprise, "But all of us are injured in some way."

"Which is why you should _get in the infirmary_ instead of gabbing out in the corridors!" snapped an older woman from inside the medical wing. Half of Hastati jumped, while the rest just sagged tiredly. Ace lead them into the room, meeting the gaze of the older woman inside.

She was wearing the typical grey flightsuit of UNSC personnel, so she

could see her name "Thompkins, L." and a white coat was thrown over straight shoulders. Piercing blue eyes peered out from under a crown of snow white hair. Those eyes narrowed upon seeing Ace.

"What in Heaven's name have you done to yourself, girl?" she snapped, gesturing for all of them to commandeer beds.

The witch gave a half shrug, "You should check Sully first, ma'am. He got shot in the thigh."

Thompkins leveled a finger at her. "Don't you talk again with that wound," the doctor snapped, glancing over at the too-pale Sully, then back to Ace, before conceding the point.

Doctors are the same everywhere, Ace mused, mentally shaking her head at the old woman's antics, but didn't dare say anything to the effect out loud. Poppy had been a faithful healer to the end, if a bit. . . draconic.

'Draconic?' Kelly inquired, causing a flicker of Ace's surroundings. The Spartans had their helmets off, and they were speaking to an ONI agent "a colonel" for their debriefing.

Absolutely. She dealt with children every day for years. More often than not, they tended to ignore her instructions and end up back in the infirmary wing, the witch explained.

The pair fell silent again. Neither of them were particularly talkative, and the only reason they had spoken so much to each other was due to their. . . figuring each other out.

'The colonel's going to have you sent here after you're treated,' Kelly forewarned her as Thompkins made her way over to the cadet after finishing sewing up Sully's leg.

Fun. Nothing significant that I should avoid telling him, aside from the whole 'connection' and 'clone' things? _

'No. Report faithfully.' There was a brief pause. 'Except for the clone and connection things. Obviously.'

Obviously. Ace gave a grimace when Thompkins reported that the cauterized flesh would have to be removed and then the edges sewn together, but gave her assent.

She hated needles.

**AN: **If you notice any mistakes, please point them out! Also, please leave a review on your way out :]

12. Other Side of Things

**AN: **Woo, another chapter done! Yay! Celebrations! . . . Yeah. Here you are. Song is now 'Gravity'.

**Chapter Twelve: **Other Side of Things

The colonel in question didn't appear very intimidating, if Ace was honest with herself. But he was ONI, and that in and of itself was something to be wary of. ONI didn't become ONI by being stupid.

"Cadet Kelly Black. You have some impressive records â€" or did, before the general let you focus on your squad," the colonel â€" Hughes, M., surprisingly well decorated â€" said in a cheerful voice. "Recommended for immediate active service, even a possible officer rank, by multiple attendants within Corbulo, not often that happens, you know." He went silent, hemming and hawing over what presumably were her records.

"Sorry, sir, did you need a report on what happened on Circinius?" she hesitantly asked, wondering why he sought to speak with her.

"Nah, not right now. Tell me, Kelly, did they ever tell you why you were so sick as a child?" Ace recoiled slightly, both at the use of her name and his sudden intensity.

"They said it was a genetic disorder â€" a rare one. The Black Button Malfunction, or something. Why? Sir?"

He let out a small laugh, waving one hand through the air negligently. "Oh, no reason. I was simply curious. The Master Chief says you were instrumental in your squad getting off of the planet alive and mostly intact, though. Want to talk about that?"

Hadn't she just offered to, only to be waved off? "Instrumental? I mean, I guess, but I'm sure they could have done alright without me," she replied with a shrug, touching her cheek with a scowl.

"I don't think they would have fared even half as well," Hughes said bluntly, smile vanishing. In spite of herself, Ace leaned away from the man.

"You can't know that," she said flatly, "What did you want from me, sir?"

"Mmm. You got that from one of the tall aliens, right? Wielded a glowing sword?" he asked, avoiding her questions as he gesticulated towards her face. The clone nodded, a frown tilting her lips. "Not many can claim to have survived a head-on encounter with one of them. Was it invisible before you encountered it?"

"Yeah, he was. Do you know how, sir?" she asked, "That kind of technology â€" it's decades beyond anything we can do, isn't it?" Perhaps that had been a little too shrewd. "He had a force field, too. Half of my knife strikes didn't do anything." The colonel's eyes sharpened.

"He had active shielding? How long did you fight the alien?" Hughes demanded, leaning forward. Oh. This is what he wanted. 117 hadn't come in until after the fight started, he must have reported something along the lines._

"Er, yeah, I guess. We went back and forth for a minute or two. He got some of my hair," Ace admitted, running a hand through the dark locks, "And if the Master Chief hadn't come in when he did, I

probably would have ended up dead. Got lucky." The clone gave a helpless shrug. She might not have died, or she might have. Depended on if Hastati would have been able to obtain weapons before she got critically injured.

"You're very brave, you know. I've seen grown men break down in the face of these new enemies," the man commented.

Implying I'm not grown, Ace thought with a touch of aggravation. "I'm probably going to have a mini-freak-out later, if it helps. We aren't exactly _safe_ yet, are we?" she inquired pointedly.

Hughes nodded cheerfully, backing away from her to consult his tablet.

"Well, good news is, we'll be able to easily make it to Reach without rationing too much. Bad news is, _you_ and Blue Team â€" the soldiers who picked your squad up â€" will be staying on Reach. Everyone else is going to Earth."

She stiffened. "_What?_ Why? Why Earth? Wouldn't Reach be a better option _because it's a military planet?_" she demanded touch hoarsely.

The aggravating man gave a devil-may-care smile and a loose shrug. "Maybe. Not my call. Some of my colleagues would want to speak with you, though, and check a few things. You know, the usual for an intragalactic alien empire-slash-religious order suddenly deciding to exterminate the entirety of the Human race with little to no provocation on our part."

Okay, Ace _might_ have gaped a little at the man.

"ONI has protocols for that?" she asked uncertainly. ONI wasn't known for joking around, ever.

"Classified," the man cheerfully stated, shooving her out of the room without any further word.

**Classified**, my arse,_ Ace thought angrily, stalking back towards the infirmary.

"Kelly! There you are. The doctor â€" Thompkins â€" wasn't very happy to hear you went to debrief with that injury," Vicks grumbled.

The clone gave a disgruntled shrug, plopping on the too-clean mattress with a quiet huff.

"What happened?" Lasky asked, concern bleaching into his voice.

"I don't think I like ONI," she nearly growled, "The guy that debriefed me? Definitely a few stars short of a constellation."

"Kelly!" Orenski laugh-scolded, "You can't say that about one of them. They'll find out!"

"If he gets bothered by me saying he's a bit mad, he's in the wrong field of work, then. People are _always_ saying that about ONI, especially soldiers." _With good reason, apparently._

"That doesn't make it okay," JJ quietly input.

"Nup. Don't really care what makes somethin' 'okay' or not right now, though." The entire room seemed to fill with tension. "_For the love of_. No. Stop thinking about it. We need to sleep."

"How could we possibly _sleep_?" Silva demanded, incredulous, "We were nearly _killed_, and nearly everyone in the Circinius system is _dead!_ How the hell could we sleep with that in our heads?"

"I suppose you don't?" Kelly half-asked, shrugging slightly, "I don't know. We'll probably have nightmares tonight, or for the next few months. But the memories will dull. That's what happens with traumatic memories. Might not make us feel better, but we'll be able to sleep eventually. We're gonna be in war, after all, and sleep is a precious commodity."

A slow clap startled all of Hastati. Doctor Thompkins continued to clap, stopping after a few moments of silence. "Good. At least one of you has an inkling as to what will happen in the future. _Now,___ stop talking with that wound, or _**_so help me**_, Cadet!_"

Ace wisely stopped talking, sending a glare to her snickering squadmates. _No sympathy_, she huffed internally, more amused than angry at them. At least they were laughing now.

****AN:**** Please leave a review/comment on your way out, it helps keep me motivated.

13. I'll Listen

****AN: ****Yay, two updates kinda-sorta within a month :D

****Chapter Thirteen: ****I'll Listen

It was one thing to see Reach through Kelly's memories, through their link. It was another to see it with her own eyes. Epsilon Eridanus was a fairly crowded system, planet-wise, but Reach was a marvel. Second from the sun and a beautiful garden world, _this_ was the military hub of the United Nations Space Command and the United Earth Government.

"Not what you would expect, is it?"

Ace turned to Hughes, a frown tilting her lips further down. The man had an unusually solemn look on his features, at least for him. "What?"

"Reach," he replied, gesturing towards the planet, glancing briefly at her, "I'm told it's 'too pretty for all the military ugliness that happens on it'."

She looked back at the planet, tilting her head in consideration. "Maybe," she finally offered with a shrug, "But war is always ugly. No way around that."

"What, no suggesting we move base?" Hughes almost seemed to tease. She cast him another frown.

"Why would you do that?" she asked, incredulousness colouring her tone. He shrugged, shaking his head.

"Once we make planet-side, we'll have to join Blue Team," he deflected, perhaps turning to the true reason he was here. She grunted an affirmative, studying Reach's planetary aurora.

"Kelly." Her eyes slid shut as she prayed to whatever was listening for the patience to deal with Hughes. "Kelly, if you want to tell me something, now would be the time." She turned flinty eyes onto the colonel.

"What should I tell you?" she sharply asked, "How I found my father? How I saw dozens of men and women get mowed down by alien races apparently bent on our complete annihilation? How I found out that I'm to be separated from my squad because of some _classified_ reason that I can't be told in spite of being one of the people affected by this decision? Or perhaps how _absurdly_ irritating I find you half of the time? None of that is relevant to our situation. My mental status is irrelevant, and my irritation with you is irrelevant. The only big concern here is that _there is an alien race attempting to wipe us out_, and from what I've seen? They're pretty goddamn capable of it."

Hughes stared at her, mouth slightly agape. It wasn't an expression she had seen on the man in the short time since she had met him.

"What?" she snapped after a moment.

"That's the longest I've ever heard you speak," the man quietly murmured. Her eyes slid shut again as an aggravated sigh left her mouth. Of _course_ that's what he chose to talk about.

"Yeah," she finally sighed out, letting go of her irritation, turning back to Reach. They would be landing soon, hopefully. She'd miss Hastati, but she had contact information, and could at least send letters to their family, who could then pass it on for whichever squadmate she was writing to. At least they were all recovering well, both mentally and physically. Lasky and Sully had been playing chess, last she saw, with the others occasionally interrupting to point out 'good moves' for both boys.

She had just begun to believe that they forged something unbreakable, as well. That was her luck though, wasn't it? Make everything seem like it was going to be one of the best things to have ever happened to her, then just. . . _bam_, torn apart like a leaf on a branch in the middle of a bloody hailstorm. If she could shoot Destiny, she would.

A hand fell onto her shoulder, and Ace twitched out from under it before she could think about it. "We can get you people to talk to, you realize this, right?" Hughes asked, voice suspiciously soft.

"Yeah," came the flat reply, "Just don't expect me to talk much." The witch pulled further away, stalking away from the man, letting her feet guide her.

'_You can talk to me. It doesn't even have to be out loud,' _Kelly offered quietly, _'Or we could see about contacting your mother, if possible.'_

_Apparently you are unaware of a few important factors, _Ace sighed, a grimace flickering across her lips, _First of which being that Eva Black, our mother, died when we were fifteen, just after I had recovered for the last time from my. . . __**issues**_**._**_ You didn't seem to realize that I was offering you our father's dogtags on our way to the __**Nevermore**__, as well, and it took me sending you the memory to realize who he was. Why?_

A series of emotions filtered over from Kelly, embarrassment and frustration most clear. _'I don't always pick things up from you. It's easy for me to send you stuff, and you seem adept at receiving, but it doesn't work as well the other way around. I know so little about your life â€" I've only dreamed of Aloe once, and of your life maybe a dozen times over the past. . . what, nearly fifteen years now? And most of __**those**__ were towards the beginning, when you were still sick from clone degeneration.'_

_And about our father? _Ace wondered, confused.

'_I forgot. He. . . wasn't a big part of my life, and it's too easy to forget things like that.' _Which made sense. Fifteen years was a long time, after all, and Kelly hadn't exactly had another normal family to remind her of, well, normality. They were soldiers, not children. The General of Corbulo Academy was an authority figure, a person in their chain of command, not a father to mourn over.

_What will happen, _Ace inquired after a moment, _When we see ONI on Reach? They know about me â€" UNSC's been sniffing around since my 'malfunction' didn't kill me the first dozen or so times._

'_I wish I knew,' _Kelly replied, _'But I don't. I won't let them hurt you, though, alright?'_

_You don't have to __**let **__them. ONI is capable of forcing anything they want to. You know this._

That didn't mean either of them were happy about it. Not by a long shot.

****AN: ****Hey, how're you guys doing? If you had a crappy day, I hope I've made it a bit better :D Please leave a review on your way out! :]

14. Hear Anything You Say

****AN:**** Hey, guys. Been a while, huh? My bad. :\ This chapter is also a bit filler-ish, but fear not! Next chapter should detail the beginnings of Ace's future with ONI! Also, ****Thank you ****to all reviewers, including the guests ****MysByTheNight ****and ****Guest**** for leaving reviews! :D

****Chapter Fourteen: ****Hear Anything You Say

Ace had debated whether or not to tell Hastati that ONI was. . . _commandeering_ her. Eventually, she opted to gather them up in one

of the mostly empty cargo holds to explain the situation at least partially. Kelly "087" hovered nearby, despite Ace's urgings for her to remain with her own team.

"What's going on, Black?" Orenski asked, eying her suspiciously, "You don't usually do this." 'This' being dragging them to isolated areas, that is.

"I'm not usually in a position to have to do this," Ace replied calmly, settling into a corner with Hastati arraying themselves nearby.

"What?" Silva wondered, brow furrowing in confusion, "What do you mean by that?" JunJie, Walter, and Lasky seemed to be equally confused.

"I'm not going to be able to stay with you guys," the clone explained gently, "I'm told that I'm to get off at Reach, with Blue Team."

"_What?_" Silva nearly screeched, incredulity clear, "Why? You're a cadet!"

Ace nodded solemnly, letting her shoulders droop. "I know, but those are my orders. I don't know _why_, only that I have to. Colonel Hughes "the ONI agent that debriefed me" said that it's classified."

"Who else is going, do you know?" Orenski asked, a scowl tilting down her lips. Ace shook her head, rolling her shoulders in a shrug.

"He won't tell me anything else," she explained, "The only ones I know for sure are coming are 087, 104, and 117 "the three soldiers that were with us on the pelican." Of course, there were more SPARTANS onboard the _Nevermore_, but Ace wasn't supposed to know that. The operatives were kept separate from the rest of the personnel onboard.

"That's _bullshit_," Walter snarled, slamming a fist onto the deckplates. It had to have hurt him, but he ignored it. "You're _our_ squadmate! If you get pulled out at Reach, _we_ should, too!" Ace certainly didn't disagree, but she would very much rather that her squad stay as far away from ONI operations as possible.

"I'm sorry," she apologized softly, lacking anything else to say.

"It's not your fault," Lasky assured, a small smile being directed at her.

"Of course it isn't!" Silva snapped, "It's ONI, isn't it? Who knows what the hell they're planning on doing with her!" Ace glanced at the younger woman, startled by the vehemence in her voice. Usually, people didn't dislike ONI so much.

"Whoa, Silva. Where did that come from?" Orenski asked, a cautious tone in her voice and her eyes flinty.

"I heard the general talking to you, Kelly. I heard him cautioning you to stay away from the ONI at Corbulo. What's _really_ going on?"

Silva demanded, ignoring Orenski for the moment.

Ace grimaced, looking away from her squad. Her father had warned her multiple times. It must have occurred in one of the hallways, perhaps after her scores had begun to slip. It shouldn't have happened.

With a sigh and a weak shrug, she offered up a half truth, "The only thing I can think of is the Black Button Malfunction that I had as a kid, but I'm not sure why ONI would care so much about it. It's just a really rare illness, isn't it?"

"I've been looking into that. There was an apparent outbreak of BBM, with hundreds of children being affected in the past twenty years," Sully chimed in, a thoughtful frown in place, "And it was virtually unheard of before then."

The other clones, Ace realized with a start. She hadn't known that ONI had actually chosen 'BBM' to cover for the mass deaths caused by clone failure. "Really? There were others?" she asked, wincing at how hoarse her voice had come out as.

"Yup. You must be one of the only survivors." Another grimace was drawn from the clone.

'_I'm coming in,'_ Kelly stated, already moving.

Don't, Ace ordered instantly, _Why would you? They don't know anything about â€"_"

'_Exactly. How many of your memories are they dragging up? I can feel your pain, __**sister**__, our bond allows that.'_

The witch's lips flicked down in a scowl. _Of __**course**__ discussing this was going to cause pain. You don't need to protect me from my own squad,_ she grumbled, _And the pain will go away._ So would the guilt, eventually. It would just take Ace time to come to terms with the fact that she had forgotten about all of the other clones, for however brief a time it had been. Kelly settled back, grumbling quietly. A few pointed foreign curses were occasionally directed in the vague area of their bond, but there wasn't any heat behind the insults.

Zoning back into what Hastati was doing â€" namely them prodding at Sully for bringing up bad memories for Ace â€" she let out a forlorn sigh. "Your inter-system comm addresses haven't changed, have they?" she asked, interrupting the group.

"What? Oh, no, they should be the same â€" at least our personal ones should be. Our Corbulo ones. . . I don't know if they'll work anymore," Orenski hesitantly offered, shrugging helplessly. The witch nodded, accepting that, though she personally thought that just because the institution was gone that it was unlikely its ISC were disabled. Of course, she didn't know much about the way of communications in this life beyond mission comms.

'_At least you have those,'_ Kelly murmured quietly.

Yeah. At least I have those. Hopefully ONI won't completely isolate me from them, the clone mused just as quietly, internally wincing a moment later as she realized how that could have come out. _Sorry.

I'm nervous about this._

'_Of course you are. __**I'm**__ nervous about this, and I'm not the one they're ordering to heel,'_ the SPARTAN stated matter-of-factly.

Here's hoping, Ace offered up.

'_Here's hoping,' _the other agreed.

****AN:**** Just a quick note on the ISC: Largely like email addresses for civilian communications, but still takes a bit to go from one system to another, unlike the near-instant for IAPC â€" intra-planetary communications â€" and IASC â€" intra-system communications (Which includes _inter-planetary_ communications). (Colloquial: ISC: isk; IAPC: yapac; IASC: yasac) Also, yeah, probably not going to be brought up again much, if at all, in the future. Just a bit of background for how civilians from various planets might communicate.

Anyway, please leave a review on your way out! :D

15. Selling Yourself Out

****AN: ****Sorry about the extremely late update! Thank you to everyone who reviewed/followed/favorited in the interim! :D

****Chapter Fifteen: ****Selling Yourself Out

Reach. . . The instant the witch had stepped foot onto the planet, she realized just how much affection had drifted over from Kelly. Fondness tugged at her heart as she stepped off the dropship, hoisting the bag that Hastati had shoved on her further up her shoulder. 087 brushed past her, gently knocking shoulders â€" well, 087's armoured arm to Ace's shoulder. _'Beautiful, isn't it?_' the SPARTAN murmured. The cadet â€" ex-cadet? â€" looked around, scanning the distant mountains over the smooth stone that made up the â€" presumable â€" ONI base.

Yeah, she affirmed, sighing quietly as Colonel Hughes nudged her forward with a palm briefly pressing on her back. The witch didn't dare risk a glance at 087 or any of the other SPARTANS. _Keep an ear out for me, please? Maybe an eye on the outside, too,_ she requested, resigned to the fact that ONI may not let her go. She could eventually, potentially, find a way out, of course, but it would take time, depending on how long they had her, what they wanted to do with her, how deep they buried her in their files. . .

'_I'll do you one better,'_ Kelly promised, determination filtering through their bond. It was hard not to look towards her â€" original? Progenitor? â€" but the witch cast her eyes to the ground, letting Hughes push her along, through the heavy doors, into the unnamed ONI base. Sky and stone gave way to stone and metal and glass, fresh air giving way to stale and filtered. Aloe â€" Kelly â€" _Ace_, Ace would do for now, it would have to, because she didn't have a middle name to justify using. And it wasn't like she didn't have a tendency to ace her combat scores, anyway, though that was probably due to Kelly-087, now that she thought about it.

'_I never intentionally bled to you,'_ Kelly offered quietly.

You were trained until it was instinct. Of course it bled through, whether we wanted it or not.

'_But. . . I don't get bleeds from you,'_ the SPARTAN protested, though she felt doubtful. Ace cycled through things Aloe would have had as an instinct, and selected the foremost obvious.

Oh? And how do you feel about flying? she inquired, tilting her head unintentionally. Surprise filtered through their bond. Fragments of memories â€" a ship, fear, the ground falling away, then John and Sam, the ground falling away again but the fear was replaced with a sort of ecstatic elation.

'_You think that maybe my fear from before I became a Spartan changed because you. . . You, what, came â€" alive? Back into life, as my â€" my __**clone**__, and altered. . . me?_'_ It didn't sound good, at all, when put like that, but of course it didn't. Nothing of their situation was consensual. They had to live with that, because nothing could be changed about it. Kelly-087 had been changed by Ace, and Ace. . . She was irrevocably changed, as well. She was calmer, now, by a lot, even considering her life experiences as Aloe. But she wasn't having as many nightmares about Tom anymore, either.

Of course, she told her progenitor, _Your fear was part of you. You also hated being closed in, didn't you, just judging by how antsy I get sometimes when I box myself in. And now I don't like tart things. I love to run more than ever. I feel so achingly lonely, too, and. . . I trust them. I trust your brothers and sisters, far beyond the trust I gave anyone as Aloe. This is a two way street, Kelly._

'_Of course it is.' _Of course it was.

Ace concentrated on her footsteps, left, right, left, right. .

.

****A-A****

Doctor Catherine Halsey was many things. Observant was one. Ever since returning to Reach, her SPARTANs had been. . . off, Kelly in particular. She observed the woman's behaviour, and drew a few hypothesis. The first, something significant had occurred in Circinius. The second, Kelly wanted to speak with her. The third, she knew what was causing the other doctors to be so. . . unprofessional. Doctor Halsey had caught Doctor Reyes cursing in Spanish with a heat that was unlike him, in a display of emotion that she knew would later mortify him where he to reflect upon the incident, realizing someone had witnessed his. . . perturbation. The fourth, of course, was all of the above.

She had her A.I. Kalmiya draw up the mission records, scanning the files. As she read through them, her eyebrows slowly rose up her forehead as she came to realise that Daisy's clone had not, in fact, been the last to survive as she had been lead to believe. The fact that Kelly's clone - not John's - had survived so long, had even flourished so well, was. . . astonishing, to be frank. This said that John's luck was not an inherent feature, or that Kelly's clone had survived through a quirk in her making, not through luck.

And she was here. In the base. How had they expected to keep this from _her_? Perhaps they hadn't been. With a nearly inaudible huff, Catherine transferred the files to a datapad, standing. She would see this clone herself and determine how it differed from _her_ Kelly. Then she would speak with them.

****A-A****

The tests they ran on Ace weren't unexpected in any way. Nor was the pain the tests brought on. Most of this was withheld from the connection, so Kelly wasn't as distraught as she might have been. That, in itself, was a good thing. Kelly being distraught meant bad things for most of the base, especially if the other IIs were on her side. (Which, of course, they would be, because that's how they were trained.)

Information gleaned from the medical files they sometimes left unattended told Ace that they were trying to find something in her DNA, but what, exactly, was left unsaid. She almost wished to see Colonel Hughes again, as she hadn't seen anyone that wasn't medical personnel for over a week now, but she refrained from asking after him. (It wouldn't do to get him in trouble or watched, just in case he was on her side, after all. He had seemed to like her, but she could be wrong.)

_How're you holding up, __**madÃ;r**__?' _Bird? Why would Kelly refer - ah. Flight. Right.

I'm fine, she told her progenitor, _You know I am._ The quiet sense of amusement was sent alongside the words, hoping to misguide Kelly.

You say that, but I can feel something off. How could the SPARTAN be so adept at the mind arts? What was Aloe doing wrong, that even her counterpart could tell something was off, when she was trying to hide it?

_It's nothing, _the witch dismissed with a mental scowl.

You're lying,' Kelly pointed out sharply.

_It's nothing. I can handle it, _she argued, frustration growing.

_You are __**lying.**__ Trust me, please, let me help you,' _the SPARTAN stated, on the edge of begging.

I'm fine. You don't have to help me simply because we're stuck together like this, Ace nearly scoffed, mentally turning her back to her progenitor.

_Well, I'm certainly not going to leave my __**sister **__to be experimented on and hurt by ONI! You think you're blocking me out, but I can still feel how much you're hurting right now, Ace! Let us help you!_'_

The witch recoiled further away, dismayed. _I'm not your sister. We didn't - we didn't grow up together, you __**know**__ this. You don't have to try so much. I don't want you to risk you or the others to try to help me._

To help the girl who basically stole her family, who stole her _life_, while she was forced to train and to endure augmentations and a life of killing against her wishes.

_ 'I chose this, Aloe. I chose to go through. Doctor Halsey __**asked**__ us if we would be willing to fight. We chose. You didn't.' _

Except, of course, Ace would have, had she been born in an actual body and not that of a degenerating clone. If she had been born as one of ONI's chosen, she would have accepted the life of a SPARTAN. She would have fought Insurrectionist and Covenant alike.

_ 'But you didn't choose to be hurt like this.' _ The mental equivalent to sweeping her arm, indicating the room and the tools and the bed she was bound to, accompanied the words. _ 'You didn't choose to be used like this.' _ No.

No, she hadn't. But she had already died. She had already lived her life. She could probably get out of this, if she wanted to. If she were willing to kill to get out. But where would she go? Hide in the mountains, live off alien prey like a fugitive as the galaxy _burned_ under the onslaught of the hostile aliens?

Like _hell_ she would.

Ace would get someone to talk to her, and she would convince them, one way or another, that she was an asset, more than just something to experiment upon.

****A-A****

_ Hmm. _ The girl was interesting, Catherine would admit. She didn't fidget with the straps keeping her hands bound to the bed, unlike Kelly, who would have surely done so by now. According to the notes, she was fed, watered, and allowed to walk around at set times, like one would for a pet. Of course, the complacency was almost worrying, considering the fact the girl hadn't even voiced any protests or questions about her situation.

Catherine startled back half a step when green eyes - a dark, almost olive-drab green, instead of the bluish-green that Kelly possessed - looked directly at her, clearly flicking over her form even through the mirror that was to conceal her from the subject.

_ What in the name. . . _No. The files had listed oddities, had listed the implausible reformations the girl's body had done to itself, almost mimicking a SPARTAN's augmentations. They hadn't checked her eyes, though, and they should have. If she could see Catherine, what else did the clone know?

This wouldn't do. Catherine turned, leaving the girl for now. She had people to talk to.

_ I wonder who that was, _ Ace wondered softly, relaxing back into the bed, every so often stretching out a limb or arching her body, to excersize the muscles as best she could. Kelly was silent - asleep, from the feel. The person, a woman by the outline, had left soon after she had noticed them. Perhaps she should have been more subtle

in her examination of the person? Mm. No. What was the point? She nestled herself back, allowing a doze to overtake her.

The girl was clearly surprized to see Hughes, Catherine noted, but allowed the man to unbind her and lead her out of the room with no trouble. The way her head was turned to the man indicated she was actually listening to his inane rambling instead of blocking it out, as most would. Hughes' eyes flicked over the girl repeatedly, a slight frown ticking down his lips, furrowing his brow even through the smile that was to hid his frown.

Hm. He was concerned for her. Not too surprising, considering his daughter and how young the clone seemed sometimes.

As they entered the conference room - the girl still clad in the flimsy full-body suit that Hughes had procured for her - Catherine set the datapad with the video stream aside, flicking her fingers to deactivate the stream.

"Hello, Cadet Black," she heard one of the admirals - Parangosky - greet the girl.

Interestingly, it only took half of a moment - perhaps less - for the girl to realize she was in the presence of a board and saluted them, primarily directing it to the official that had greeted her, but otherwise remained silent.

Parangosky cleared her throat, studying the girl intently. "We understand that you might be confused as to why you were kept and examined so thoroughly." The admiral fell silent a moment, waiting a response that wasn't forthcoming. "We have an offer." Again, there was no response, simply. . . waiting. The admiral, had she been a lesser woman, would have squirmed in her seat. That did not prevent others of the board from doing so.

"Cadet, would you like to hear our offer?" Vice Admiral Stanforth asked impatiently, glaring down at the girl.

"Yes, sir," the clone finally replied, turning her eyes onto the man. There was a long pause.

"How would you like to fight for us, Black?" another official asked.

After a long moment, the girl's flat features broke, a broad smirk tilting her face into a parody of joy, twisting her scar oddly.

"Against the aliens, you mean?" she inquired, but didn't wait for an answer, "I would love to, sir."

Catherine let a brief, smug smirk decorate her own face, unaware of how closely it replicated the clone's.

16. Parallel on Words

****AN:**** Yep, been a while again. It happens, and at least I do eventually update.

****Chapter Sixteen: Parallel on Words****

Ace was largely content to let ONI continue their tests, especially when they began to let her do more physically active tests. They gauged her speed, her strength, her stamina, her recovery time from injuries, and most of the biopsies they had done earlier " when she had first come into their care " probably told them the density of certain muscles or their composition, comparatively speaking. She knew full well that her abilities were abnormal. They were, after all, heavily influenced by her magic-induced regenerative abilities.

'I hate that you let them hurt you like this,' _Kelly grumbled in the depths of their bond.

And I hate that you had to go through similar tests when you were younger, Ace replied, _But there's nothing we can do about either situation. They have to know what I'm capable of in order to deploy me properly._

'That doesn't mean I have to like it,' _the SPARTAN huffed.

Of course not, Ace agreed. Neither of them had to _like_ it. Ace didn't like the pain or the doctors' insensitivity to her pain, but there wasn't anything she could really do about it. Especially when they actually started to _ask_ for extra samples, to make the process of creating SPARTANs more efficient. Ace had complied, hoping that she would be able to help them make SPARTANs out of actual adults, instead of children.

Months passed slowly, and Ace was beginning to become impatient. She had to have Kelly send a missive to her friends in order to let them know she was even alive, let alone alive and well. Of course, ONI was came to her, wondering about how she had even managed to get access to any ISC while under their care. Neither Ace nor Kelly saw fit to enlighten them, finding it more amusing to be deemed an extensive ability of her own.

(Of course, Ace mused, it was entirely possible that she could have done essentially the same thing without Kelly's assistance, but it was far simpler to ask Kelly to do so, instead of risking her privileges getting taken away.)

Eventually, of course, they ran out of tests to run on Ace, and had to send her elsewhere. They sent her to the training camp, Jotunheim " where the orbital drop-shock troopers were trained after they transferred from whatever branch they had been in previously. Kelly sniggered through their bond once she had learned of this, knowing full well the rivalry between SPARTANs and ODSs, and how it had affected even Ace. There was also the small matter of Ace not liking anyone who went out of their way to be antagonistic to others, let alone authority figures or fellow students/trainees.

And Ace was simply _too good_, at least in the opinions of some ODSs. Too fast, too strong, too resilient to be one of the 'normal' soldiers. They thought she was a SPARTAN infiltrator. (It, apparently, wouldn't be the first time. Kelly wondered who it had been. Ace wasn't of the mind to ask the ODSs, no matter how curious she had been.)

They weren't entirely wrong, however. She was related to the SPARTANS, and related to ONI. Of course, ONI wasn't happy about her supposedly 'breaking cover' â€" she argued against that assertion with a vehemence that surprised her handlers. Eventually, after the fourteenth time that deliberate neglect from other ODSTs nearly resulted in her death as well as mission failure, they chose to move her to a different program.

This different program of theirs wasn't on Reach. It wasn't even in the same system. Ace hardly got to tell Kelly before their connection stretched too far, letting only the barest flickers of the strongest emotions through. It was uncomfortable, to say the least, especially after near-constant exchanges between the pair. It felt too quiet, too isolated.

The program, though. The program was another SPARTAN one â€" the SPARTAN-III Program. The group she was assigned to was the 'Beta Company', presumably following an 'Alpha Company'. They gave her the designation 'B-312', and told her that she no longer had a name.

They gave her augmentations, different from those Kelly had received, but still painful. They very nearly killed her, and she had been sick for weeks afterwards. It took months to get used to the peculiar changes that the new augmentations had wrought, as well, even given subconscious help from Kelly's memories. (She didn't recall the world looking this different through Kelly's eyes, though. There were more colours, and sometimes people seemed to move slowly, stiffly.)

But she did get used to them. In fact, Ace took their difficulty as a blatant challenge to her pre-augmentation capabilities, and made a concentrated effort to make herself at least as good as the average SPARTAN-III, if not among the best of them. The once-witch didn't hear the whispering, the suspicion, very often. The Threes didn't miss her sudden entry, nor the fact that so few people even knew of her before her entry into the program â€" which is to say that only the drill sergeants and their S-II commander â€" Kurt-051. The fact that he has been here the entire time shocked Ace. Kelly had been. . . unhappy, to say the least, when 051 had been spaced. (Being spaced was the biggest fear of any SPARTAN-II. They could do nothing in space, not like they could on the ground.)

The fact that 051 was joined by CPO Mendez would have also been a shock to Kelly. Mendez had. . . He was a friend of sorts to 051, now. It was peculiar. Something Ace would be more than willing to keep an eye on.

Between Ace's training, she watched over 051, eyes narrowed. He must have been ordered to train these SPARTAN-IIIs, but he seemed fond of his trainees. He even took the time to speak with her, on occasion, and Ace had to with-hold the urge to shift to Kelly's posture, to tell him he wasn't alone any longer, that she was here, too.

But the once-witch wasn't entirely sure the advance would be welcome, especially as she was merely a clone of one of his old friends. So, she held off. She dealt with her training, watched him from a distance, went on missions as ordered by ONI â€" always coming back to Onyx, never meeting up with Kelly in person.

She joined Beta Company in their OPERATION: TORPEDO, by order of ONI and _Colonel Ackerson._ (She did not like Colonel Ackerson. He was nothing like Halsey, nothing like what any decent person would be.) It was 2545, and the operation was a disaster from start to finish. They did not have the forces they needed, nor the supplies, nor the support. Over two hundred of her compatriots and allies died. Only six Beta Company SPARTANs, not including herself, made it out alive, and even then it was only thanks to Mendez and 051's efforts. At least one of the survivors had been hurt enough to be unable to continue on the front lines, and only two others made it out with few major injuries.

This disaster was further compounded when, after she had healed, Ace was assigned directly under Colonel Ackerson, and was told to obey him. She did not refuse outright, seeing an opportunity to dismantle him and finish his feud with both Halsey and her SPARTAN-IIs, to finish his willful " and almost eager " sacrificing of lives and children.

Her reconnaissance of the man and what he did took years, especially to gather and conceal witnesses of his atrocities. He gave her assignments varying from stealing something, to seducing someone, to threatening someone, to murder. She was not allowed questions or speak without cause, and he simply called her his shadow, never addressing her by a proper name, or even a designation. Ace did not like him. She wanted him _dead_. (Kelly ached to rescue her, to rip Ackerson from limb to limb. Ace made her wait. Ace was planning something far worse for Ackerson. She would _ruin_ him.)

And if Ackerson died at some point after being ruined, well, clearly Ace couldn't be at fault. She had wanted to bring him to justice, didn't she? Why would she kill him afterwards? And if she got her goal, if she was reassigned to a completely different planet from where Ackerson was imprisoned, then surely she had an alibi protecting her?

(Kelly, however. . . Kelly was elsewhere. Perhaps in the vicinity of Ackerson's prison. But how would _Kelly_ know Ackerson's significance? How would _Kelly_ know how to get into the prison and arrange an accident for the disgraced colonel? Why would she?)

But ONI seemed to feel like they owed her an apology, or they had a lack of suicide-level missions, for they reassigned her to Reach. First to a Sabre test program, then. . . Then to a squad of SPARTANs.

It had been _years_ since she had been on an actual team, Sabre program excluded as she had been a lone pilot.

It would certainly take getting used to.

End
file.